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MODERN DEVELOPMENTS IN METHODISM

WILLIAM REDFERN

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Edited by

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National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches.
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X

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BY

WILLIAM REDFERN

LONDON: NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCHES. THOMAS LAW, MEMORIAL HALL, E.C.

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PREFACE

THE title of this book may be construed in two different ways. It may be taken as having to do with the evangelistic, rather than the ecclesiastical, side of Methodism, and particularly with the organisations and movements which have been started in recent years; or, it may be taken as having reference to the origin, the polity, and the history of the various Methodist bodies. The former interpretation has not been left entirely out of view. It has been considered, wherever convenient, in most of the chapters, and it has occupied the whole of the chapter on "Methodism As It Is." The latter interpretation, however, has been accepted by the writer; and his chief aim has been to explain how the branches of Methodism came to be, why they assumed their present shapes, how

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they are related to one another, as well as to the original stem.

The writer can honestly say that he has carefully studied the literature of the subject; not only the well-known Methodist histories and biographies, but also many magazine articles, pamphlets, memoirs, reports, private documents, &c., which have been gathered from many sources. Also, he can honestly say that he has striven to be perfectly fair and correct. Certainly he has made no statement with the desire to wound. Indeed, he sincerely hopes that, by elucidating Methodist history, he has made some contribution, however slight, to the cause of Methodist reunion. That fascinating dream can never be realised by the forgetting, or the ignoring, of history.

Sincere thanks are given to all those friends who have supplied the writer with material bearing on the subject of this sketch. It is impossible for him to mention all their names; but he is grateful to them. He is especially grateful to the Revs. E. Boaden, G. Eayrs, W. H. Horwill, M.A., and Geo. Packer, who have revised the proofs and made valuable suggestions.

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I

INTRODUCTION

THE growth of Methodism from the very first to the present hour has been almost uninterrupted. The number of members in society, which at the time of Wesley's death, was just under 60,000 in Great Britain,[1] has steadily increased until now it is nearly a million; and with this growth in membership there has been a corresponding growth in organisation, resources, influence, missionary enterprise, and the value of property. Best of all, this growth is due almost entirely to the spiritual vitality, and evangelistic zeal of the people. Unfortunately, the history of Methodism, while it has been one of growth, has been also, and perhaps mainly, one of division. Before Wesley had been twenty-five years in his grave there were four Methodist bodies in England, one of them being a secession and the other two being

[1] Including missions, &c., it was about 80,000.

offshoots from the Wesleyan mother-Church. In 1797 the Methodist New Connexion seceded; in 1807 the Primitive Methodist Church began its course on Mow Cop; and in 1815, in a Devonshire farmhouse, the first Bible Christian Society was formed. In 1827 a conflict commenced which continued for more than twenty years, and which resulted in the withdrawal or expulsion from the Wesleyan body of 100,000 members. The one outstanding fact, then, for us to consider is that, although in 1791 Methodism was a compact body controlled by one Conference, in 1851 it was split up into at least seven separate bodies. How can this fact be explained? What was the cause, or what the causes, of these secessions, offshoots, and disruptions?

It will, I think, be generally conceded that hardly any task could be more difficult and delicate than that of attempting to answer this question fairly; for whatever the answer may be, it will awaken painful memories and, perhaps, wound denominational susceptibilities. Happily, the task was never easier than it is now. The spirit of division has entirely passed away. Methodist people, separated as they are, recognise more than ever how truly they belong to one another.

They are conscious of a bond of kinship which no circumstances, however painful, can entirely sunder. They are proud of their common ancestry, and bear the unmistakable family likeness. They delight to call themselves Methodists. They testify, one and all, to the growing sentiment of mutual esteem and affection. They cherish the dream of re-union, and indeed before these pages appear in print three of the smaller denominations will be amalgamated under the name of "The United Methodist Church." Union, and not division, is the master-thought of our time. The consequence is that the fires of vindictiveness and vituperation have died out, never, let us hope, to be rekindled.

At the same time, it is necessary for any writer, in giving an account of these modern developments of Methodism, to speak the truth. He must, while endeavouring to be dispassionate, unbiassed, and even generous, at the same time and above all, be accurate. At whatever cost he must deal with facts, must take in all the facts, must see them from the right standpoint and in their true perspective. He must distinguish principles from passion, and the essential causes from the merely accidental circumstances. As the Inspired Book puts it, he must "declare the

thing as it is" (Job xxx. 3). Not only in the interests of historical truth is this necessary, but also in the interests of Methodist re-union, for that goal can never be reached if the great principles which have given birth to the liberal movements in Methodism be misconstrued or disregarded or denied.

1. In tracing these Methodist movements we shall probably find that they reflected much of what was going on outside. No religious denomination, and certainly not Methodism, which consists entirely of the middle and the working classes, can be hermetically sealed against the spirit of the age. Take the dates already mentioned—1791, 1797, 1807, and 1815. What do they remind us of? They remind us of the French Revolution, beginning with the fall of the Bastille and ending with the Battle of Waterloo. That monumental event, with its thunders and earthquakes, its passionate hopes and its wild unrest, its panics and its terrors, sounding the doom of feudalism and announcing the onward march of the democracy, stirred our national life to its depths. It was in 1791 that Louis fled from Paris, only to be recaptured and afterwards to be sent to the guillotine. In the same year Mirabeau died. Three years later

Danton and Robespierre were executed. Afterwards Napoleon was made a general. Democracy was beginning to assert itself both in England and across the Atlantic. The American War of Independence was over, resulting in democratic self-government. In 1791 the house of Dr. Priestley, in Birmingham, was burned down by rioters because he had arranged a dinner in celebration of the taking of the Bastille. The next year Thomas Paine, the friend of Washington and Franklin, was tried and found guilty of having written *The Rights of Man*. Edmund Burke had just published his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, thirty thousand copies of which were rapidly sold. So profound was the panic that the Habeus Corpus Act was suspended, and social reform seemed, for a while, impossible. Notwithstanding all this, however, the democratic spirit was making headway. The best of the young poets—Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey—were its singers. Leigh Hunt and Montgomery suffered imprisonment for it. The weekly newspaper and the public meeting were slowly coming more and more into vogue, and the people were gradually discovering their power. Such was the state of things during the first twenty years after

Wesley died. It could not fail to influence the Methodist people. Take, again, the period from 1827 to 1849. It was the period of social reform, won by the people for the people. It was the period when Roman Catholic disabilities were removed, the franchise extended, the Corn Laws abolished, tithes commuted, the penny post established, and new railways opened. It was the time of the growth of municipal government and the struggles of Chartism. In 1852, when the Great Exhibition was opened, the common people somehow felt that a new era of peace and prosperity lay before them. And as Methodism was made up mostly of the common people it could not remain untouched by the prevailing democratic spirit. These remarks are not intended to suggest that the movements in Methodism were determined at all by political considerations. What is meant is that the spirit of the age became more and more democratic and that it leavened Methodism, just as it leavened literature and the Church generally.

2. The real cause of developments in Methodism, however, was not political. When the early Methodist reformers were branded as Republicans and Reformers, if there was any truth in the charge, it was not

the whole nor the deepest truth. They were imbued with religious convictions. They believed in the priesthood of all believers. Freedom was their inalienable spiritual birthright, and they could do no other than claim it. Not only did they hold great principles, but they were courageous enough to apply their principles and to make great sacrifices for them. Also, because they were intensely evangelistic they were convinced that, with a larger freedom, they could do a more effective work for their Master. No calumny could be unworthier than to represent such men as self-seeking partisans.

3. There was one doctrine against which the democratic spirit, the religious faith, and the evangelistic ardour of those men—Kilham, Bourne, O'Bryan, Griffith, and the rest of them—alike protested. It was the doctrine of pastoral supremacy. But for this even the absolute sovereignty of the Wesleyan Conference, however unpalatable, might have been endured. The fact, however, that the Conference was composed exclusively of preachers who claimed supreme power, and claimed it on sacerdotal grounds, made its sovereignty to be regarded as a tyranny. This pastoral supremacy was exercised in circuits as well as in the Conference,

involving the right of nomination to membership and all the important offices. All the modern developments of Methodism are vitally related to it.

What, in those dark days of division, this doctrine meant cannot be mistaken, and, in view of its great importance, I may be excused for giving, at this point, some quotations by way of definition. Let me quote from Richard Watson, Dr. Smith, and the Minutes of the Conference. Richard Watson, in his "Affectionate Address," after specifying the duties of the preacher, says: "All these duties are inherent in the very office of a Christian pastor; and all the powers necessary to fill them do therefore of right—inalienable right—belong to his office. Whatever provisions for counsel or restraint are devised, two great principles must regulate them all when a Church is scripturally constituted. (1) That such provisions imply no transfer of powers inherent in the ministry to those who are not in that office. (2) That the checks, of whatever kind they may be, shall not, under pretence of preventing the misuse of those powers, obstruct the legitimate and scriptural exercise of them for the regulation, edification, and increase of the graces and numbers of the Church." It is

well to have the doctrine stated with such admirable clearness, and by such a man. Dr. Smith, the learned historian of Methodism, expounds it quite as clearly. He says: "By bequeathing to the ministers constituting the 'Legal Hundred' the power of appointing preachers to Methodist chapels, &c., Wesley undoubtedly constituted the ministers the permanent and supreme authority in Methodism. The scriptural idea of a Church is evidently a unity of clergy and laity working together for the general good, with an ultimate authority and responsibility resting in the ministry. The degrading and democratic notion that a minister is paid by the people, and is therefore the servant of the people, and must be appointed by the people, had no place in the Churches founded by the Apostles, and reared under their guidance. In the appointment to office, whatever may be required of the people in the way of submission and consent, the authority to make the appointment does not arise from them and ascend upward, but comes from the Head of the Church and descends downward. The responsibility of ultimate authority in the Church is placed in the pastorate." Watson and Smith will be accepted as authorities by all intelligent

readers, but there can be no question at all as to the authority of a carefully prepared deliverance by the Wesleyan Conference. I will quote from the famous "Rule" passed by the Conference of 1835. It states: "The power of determining the sentence to be passed on an offender, thus uniformly and from the beginning reserved to our superintendents, the Conference believes to be essential to the scriptural duties and functions of the pastoral office. Those duties and functions they can on no account consent to abandon or permit to be frittered away; for that would seriously endanger the purity and peace of our Connexion, on the one hand, and the right liberties and spiritual privileges of our people, on the other hand. The pastoral duty and power, vested in the Christian ministry, to exclude obstinate offenders from our religious fellowship, for manifest violations of the general laws of the Holy Scriptures, or of the particular rules of our Connexion, are clearly essential to peace and purity." Dr. Smith, commenting on this "Rule," which, let it be remembered, was not passed hastily and incidentally, but was intended to be an official manifesto to the people, says it was regarded by the dissentients as containing "the strongest possible

assertion of the right of ministers to the exercise of an efficient pastoral authority in the Church." Whether this doctrine of pastoral supremacy is supported by Scripture, whether it is now held by all the members of the Wesleyan Conference, and whether it is generally acted upon, even by those who accept it in theory, are questions which do not concern us. Our province is that of history, not of polemics. We must "declare the thing as it is," and therefore it will be our duty to show that this doctrine explains largely, if not altogether, the origin of the offshoots and disruptions of Methodism.

II

BEFORE WESLEY'S DEATH

METHODISM was born in a revival; and in its earliest days it had neither a polity nor a plan. The one aim of Wesley was, as he beautifully expressed it, "to spread scriptural holiness over the land." He was troubled with no speculations as to future organisation. "Everything arose just as occasion offered." The early Methodists met together simply for spiritual quickening. Except for Wesley's personal influence they had scarcely any cohesion. They had not even a distinctive creed. "The Churchman might go to Church still," wrote Wesley in the *Arminian Magazine* for 1790, "the Presbyterian, Anabaptist, Quaker, might retain their old opinions and attend their own congregations. The having a real desire to flee from the wrath to come was the only

condition required of them. Whoever, therefore, feared God and worked righteousness was qualified for this Society."

This state of things evidently could not long continue. Life must express itself in organisation, and if the organisation be developed out of living inward forces it will assume forms which are unexpected. Certainly no one could have foreseen what would be the development of Methodism. Wesley himself did not pretend to foresee it. Writing in 1748 to Peronnet he said: "We had no previous design or plan at all." His one desire was to conserve the spiritual interests of his societies. For Wesley, with all his faith and enthusiasm, was the prince of opportunists, and every step he took proved his practical wisdom.

To begin with, he saw that his converts must meet together, and then that the societies must be grouped. What objection could, he asked, be taken to this? It was, of course, an innovation, but Church or no Church, as he said, he must save souls. The same wise opportunism made him a field-preacher. There was a time when, as he said, he would have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church, but when the Church closed its doors against him, said

he, "I made a virtue of necessity." Naturally his field-preachers became his itinerant circuit preachers, or "helpers," as he called them. It followed that the people must have places for their meetings. At first these chapels were based on private deeds. Even Wesley had no legal authority over them. The idea of Connexionalism was not yet evolved. In 1744 Wesley invited his friends to meet him for conference. They met simply to talk about matters of faith and spiritual experience and evangelistic work. They did not attempt to legislate. They were an informal company. Secular things were not mentioned. It was not until afterwards that the questions of discipline, the tenure of property, the status of the preacher, and the legislative power of Conference emerged, as sooner or later they must emerge, for consideration.

But if the development of Methodism was so simple, spontaneous, and unexpected, there was one principle from which Wesley never deviated, and that was the principle of his autocracy. To the end of his long life he retained absolute power over his societies. He argued that having originated Methodism, and this power having been thrust upon him by circumstances, he was not free to relin-

quish it. His language was explicit and characteristic. "What is that power? It is the power of admitting into and excluding from the societies under my care; of choosing and removing stewards; of receiving or not receiving helpers; of appointing them when, where, and how to help me, and of desiring any of them to confer with me when I see good. And as it was merely in obedience to the Providence of God and for the good of the people that I first accepted this power which I never sought; so it is on the same consideration, not for profit, honour, or pleasure that I use it at this day." "None needs submit to it unless he will. Every preacher and every member may leave when he pleases." His power extended to every detail in Methodism. Nothing was allowed to continue contrary to his approval. No one was allowed to participate in his authority. Dr. Whitehead, the earliest and the most impartial of all Wesley's biographers, says: "During the time that Wesley governed the societies his power was absolute. There were no rights, no privileges, no office of power or influence but what were created or sanctioned by him, nor could any person hold them but during his pleasure. The whole system of Methodism, like a compli-

cated machine, was formed under his direction, and his will gave motion to all its parts and turned it this way or that way as he thought proper." That Wesley had this power thrust upon him cannot be denied. Nor can it be denied that he exercised it with wisdom and from the highest motives. It must be remembered that the people would submit to him as they would not to any other man, and also that the power was over the preachers as well as the people, and that all alike felt that their interests were safe in his hands. On the other hand, it must be said that his love of power grew as he became older, and that, as his weakness increased and he was more under the influence of his favourites, his power was not exercised with the impartiality of former years.

But under any circumstances could such absolutism in a Christian Church be justified? Had Wesley the right to contend that because he had originated Methodism he remained its master? Had he the right to stand at the door and refuse admission to all who would not bend to his will? "Every preacher and every member," said Wesley, "can leave when he pleases." Can we imagine even an apostle daring to use such

language? It is said that he intended to confer his own power on Fletcher of Madeley. What authority had he to hand over 50,000 Christian people to any man whatever? At another time Wesley declared that there were not five men capable of exercising his power. The remark only served to show how entirely absent from his mind was the thought of self-government in Methodism. Wesley never intended to give power to the people.

That this was the case was proved incontestably by the Deed of Declaration which was executed in 1784. Wesley had now presided over forty Conferences and was more than eighty years of age. Methodism had been quietly growing, as it were, in his hands. At first, as I have said, the chapels were placed on private deeds, without any restrictions except that they should be used as places of worship. Then for the sake of Connexional security it was considered necessary to secure to Wesley the right of appointment to the pulpits, and after Wesley's death to transfer this right to the Conference. Accordingly the Model Deed was framed in 1763. The question then arose, how stood the Conference from a legal point of view? After Wesley's death would it be a legal

authority at all, or only a non-entity? Having taken counsel's opinion, Wesley decided to prepare a Deed of Settlement and to have it duly enrolled in Chancery. This was done in 1784. The Legal Hundred, as it has since been termed, was hereby appointed the Legal Conference, exercising authority over all matters of Methodist discipline and administration. What we have to do with at this point is, that in the Deed of Declaration the rights of the laity were altogether ignored. Dr. Whitehead refers to this fact in very emphatic language. He says: "The first thing that strikes me is the title itself: 'A Declaration and Establishment of the Conference of the People called Methodists.' This surely is a most incongruous title. It is well known that the people called Methodists never held a Conference since Methodism existed. The Conference is an assembly of itinerant preachers only (except two or three clergymen), and its members are not assembled by any authority derived from the people. When sitting it exercises powers which are neither derived from the people, nor under any control by them. It elects members into its own body, and excludes them, at pleasure. It makes regulations and laws, not

only for the itinerant preachers, but for all ranks and orders of persons in the societies, and while these things are transacted, neither local preachers, stewards, leaders, or any of the people, have a single voice or a single representative, in the assembly. The people have no check, no balance of power, against any regulation or law the Conference may choose to decree."

That Wesley, who was a statesman as well as a saint, should keep the Methodist people for fifty years in servitude is a most remarkable fact. When he reflected that Methodism, now half a century old, was no ephemeral evangelism, but a permanent and growing organisation, he must have seen that this servitude could not last for ever. Why could he not see that his lifetime was the most favourable of all opportunities for introducing the laity to their rightful status? Remarkable as the fact may seem, however, we may be sure that it was due to no oversight. Wesley had made up his mind that the laity should have no power either in the Conference or in the Society. Only a year before his death (January 13, 1790) he wrote to John Mason: "As long as I live, the people shall have no share in choosing either stewards or leaders among

the Methodists. We have not, and never had, any such custom. We are no republicans, and never intend to be. It would be better for those that are so minded to go quietly away. I have been uniform both in doctrine and discipline for above these fifty years, and it is a little too late for me to turn into a new path now I am old and grey-headed."

Probably the true explanation of all this lies not so much in Wesley's conservatism, which naturally hardened as he grew older, as in his ineradicable Churchmanship. He was the son of a clergyman. He was educated at Oxford. Previous to the spiritual change which came to him in 1738 he was an extreme High Churchman ; fasted every week, refused the Lord's Supper to all who had not been baptized by a minister episcopally ordained, refused to bury all who had not been so baptized, insisted that the children of Dissenters should be re-baptized, turned his face towards the east when reciting the Creeds, and deemed himself a sacrificing priest. But this sacerdotalism came to an end when he was converted in Aldersgate Street in 1738. All his life afterwards he taught the evangelical doctrine of salvation by faith. He was profoundly influenced through reading Lord Chancellor

King's Account of the Primitive Church. He renounced the theory of Apostolical Succession, and held that the offices of bishop and presbyter were originally and essentially one. In the Minutes of 1747 he has this entry :—

Q. "What instance or ground is there in the New Testament for a National Church?"

A. "We have none at all. We apprehend it to be a merely political institution."

In spite of these opinions, however, Wesley continued to be a strict Churchman. He still believed, for instance, not only in the importance but also in the necessity of episcopal ordination by the laying on of hands, and in 1764 he enlisted the services of a Greek bishop, Erasmus, to ordain several of his lay preachers. His preachers were not permitted to administer the sacraments. His societies must not meet during Church hours. In 1786 he wrote to one of them: "If you are resolved, you may have your service in Church hours; but, remember, from that time you will see my face no more." The truth was, Wesley could hardly admit even to himself the possibility of Methodism being ultimately separated from the Church of England. Dr. Rigg has stated the truth precisely. "Wesley had plans—dreams many

would think them—by which he conceived that the Methodist organisation, as such, might in great part have been attached by the Church of England, might have been the means of largely reviving that Church, of absorbing not a little of explicit and professed Dissent, of making the Church living and national throughout the land. He had studied closely, and had left on record his admiration of, the genius and discipline of Loyola. And it was perhaps his highest desire to do in a frank and evangelical sense and spirit, for the Church of England, a work somewhat resembling what Loyola had organised with such marvellous success by the Church of Rome." [1]

The practical outcome was that he was involved in a lifelong contradiction. Dr. Beaumont compared him to a boatman on the Thames, with his eyes fixed on St. Paul's Cathedral while every stroke of his oars took him further away from it. Wesley could not help himself. "Church or no Church," he said, "we must attend to the work of saving souls," and at almost every step in the work he was declaring himself unawares a Dissenter. He could not help himself. When he preached in the open air without license

[1] See *The Churchmanship of John Wesley.*

from the bishop, when he organised religious societies under his own control, when he administered the sacrament in his chapels, when he called out lay preachers, when he convened his Conferences—at every step the process of separation was being furthered. With his eyes turned toward the Church he was pulling his boat further away from it. But he was doing it unwillingly. There are indications that in his extreme old age his love to the Church deepened. As was natural, he now looked wistfully towards his youth, and besides he was held in honour by many of the Anglican clergy. These and other things made him a stronger Churchman than ever. In 1787 he said: "When the Methodists leave the Church of England God will leave them;" in 1788 he said: "The glory of the Methodists had been not to be a separate body," and the more he reflected the more he was convinced that the Methodists ought not to leave the Church; in 1789 he said that "none who regarded his judgment or advice would separate from the Church of England"; and in 1790, eight months before he died, he pleaded with the bishop not to drive Methodists away from the Church by requiring them to be licensed as Dissenters. He was a Churchman to the last.

It is this fact which, more than any other, explains Wesley. To him Methodism was not, strictly speaking, a Church. His desire was, as Dr. Rigg says, "that it might become an affiliated branch of the Church of England." Hence the irregularity of his course, hence the reason of his absolutism, and hence his refusal to concede the rights of the laity. No other man could have enforced his will as Wesley did. Probably even he could not have enforced it very much longer. Murmurings began to be heard on all sides. The preachers were distrustful of each other and particularly of those who belonged to the inner circle. While the wealthy trustees were for the most part Churchmen the people were Dissenters, waxing more and more restive and clamorous.

It is necessary to give this brief *résumé* in order to explain what took place afterwards. It will be seen that the questions around which the agitation gathered were mainly three—first, how the preachers were to be related to one another; secondly, how Methodism was to be related to the Church of England (this involving the right of administering the sacrament); and, thirdly, how the people were to be related to the Conference.

III

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE ITINERANT PREACHERS

THE emotion of grief which Wesley's death naturally produced in the hearts of all the Methodist people, passionate, acute, and deep as it was, had soon to make way for misgivings and anxieties about the future. No one could tell what would happen in Methodism. Secret consultations were held and pamphlets circulated all over the Connexion. Preachers and people alike felt that the time had come for them to assert their claims. The first question to be discussed was, how were the preachers related to one another? and to this there could be only one reply. Some account of that reply we now propose to give.

On the 13th of April, six weeks after Wesley passed away, a meeting was held

at Halifax, the fourth circuit in importance in the Connexion. It was summoned by Wm. Thompson, the superintendent of the circuit, and besides him there were present Pawson, Bradburn, Hanby, Hopper, Roberts, Allen, Rodda, and Tennant. They issued a circular declaring that no successor to Wesley could legally be appointed, and adding several other suggestions as to the election of President, filling up vacancies in the Legal Hundred, and dividing the Connexion into districts. That there was need for such a circular will be readily understood by us when we reflect that for half a century Wesley had ruled Methodism with absolute sway. What more natural than for some to think he must have a successor? The two men to whom attention was turned were, of course, Dr. Coke and Alexander Mather. Coke was an Oxford man and an ordained clergyman, who after joining Wesley became his first lieutenant. He was the founder of Methodist foreign missions, and for some years, along with Asbury, superintended the stations in North America. Next to Wesley he was the first man in Methodism. Alexander Mather was a Scotchman, who fought at Culloden, fearless, energetic, evangelical, loyal, diplomatic, and immensely able. For twenty years he

was Wesley's right-hand man in England, and during the extreme age of Wesley acquired an extraordinary influence over him. Should one of these take Wesley's place? Coke was in America when Wesley died. On reaching England he left his ship hurriedly, hired a fishing boat, and landed in Cornwall a month or two before the opening of Conference. The first Methodist preacher he came across showed him the Halifax circular. On reading it he seemed much agitated, and, throwing himself back in his chair, exclaimed, "This is not to be borne." He posted immediately to Wakefield in order to see Mather, who was then stationed there. Not meeting him there he went to several other places until he found him; and then they were closeted together for several hours. It was evident to both of them that the idea of a governing head as successor to Wesley was hopeless.

Certainly it was proved to be impossible at the Conference (July, 1791) which was held in Manchester. More than three hundred preachers were present, and they elected as their President neither Coke nor Mather, but Wm. Thompson, who had drawn up the Halifax circular.[1] The significance of this

[1] "After Mr. Wesley's death it was supposed by many that Mr. Mather wished, either alone or with a

election could not be mistaken. It was also decided that the appointment of the President should be for only one year. The Halifax circular was adopted as a basis for future administration. At the next Conference it was decided that no President should be elected more than once in eight years, and that his power should end with the closing of Conference. Whether these rules were wise or not, they were dictated by one purpose—namely, that no successor to Wesley should be appointed to rule over the preachers.

Through the forethought of Wesley the preachers were delivered also from the domination of the Legal Hundred. Ever since the Deed of Declaration was executed there had been heart-burnings among preachers whose supposed claims had not been recognised, and fears were expressed lest the members of the Legal Hundred should make full use of their

helper, to take the reins of government and be a king in our Israel. To prevent this evil several preachers met at Halifax and laid the foundations of our present excellent constitution. But did not Mr. Mather show evident signs of discontent and mortification when he found how the business was to be settled and saw another fill the president's chair ?" (Kilham's *Martin Luther*).

powers. Legally they could have monopolised the Conference. But at the first Conference (1791), before it had power to act, Joseph Bradford, who was Wesley's travelling companion, produced a letter which Wesley had entrusted to him some years before, addressed to the Legal Hundred: "I beseech you, by the mercies of God," said Wesley, "that you never avail yourselves of the Deed of Declaration to assume any superiority over your brethren; but let all things go on among those itinerants who choose to remain together exactly in the same manner as when I was with you, so far as circumstances will permit." The command, for it was nothing less, was decisive, and the Conference unanimously agreed to obey it. The preachers were thus saved from another peril.

The most serious difficulty confronting the preachers has yet to be mentioned. It was the proposal to adopt the episcopal form of government. Wesley was supposed to be in favour of it.[1] He had adopted it in America with success. Coke and Mather had both

[1] "Wesley regarded himself," says Dr. Rigg, "as a sort of bishop, his 'assistants,' or chief preachers in charge, as quasi-presbyters, and the junior or probationary 'helpers' as a sort of deacons."

been ordained by Wesley as bishops, and were now not indisposed to press their claims. It is said that, previous to the Conference of 1791, they had drafted a scheme for the appointment of bishops, but that, for certain reasons, it was kept back. One of the preachers, Edmondson, wrote: "I suspect Mr. Mather of having formed the idea long before Mr. Wesley's death. What else could have induced him to get ordained —first, as a deacon; secondly, as a priest; and thirdly, a bishop? He always had something of despotism in his very form and constitution." Undoubtedly many of the senior preachers, trained by Wesley to dislike Presbyterianism, were disposed to support the proposal. Some of them were ready, whenever the door was opened, to lead Methodism back to the Established Church. Pawson, who was President in 1793, wrote to Atmore: "I sincerely wish that Dr. Coke and Mr. Mather may be allowed to be what they are, bishops; that they ordain two others chosen by the Conference; that these four have the government of the Connexion placed in their hands for one year, each superintending his respective district, being stationed in London, Bristol, Leeds, and Newcastle. And even supposing these four had authority to station

the preachers, who would have any cause to fear? We must have ordination among us at any rate." There was a widespread suspicion that the division of the Connexion into districts, although it is now seen to have been an admirable arrangement, was intended to prepare the way for episcopacy.

Three Conferences (1791, 1792, and 1793) were held without anything relating to the episcopal scheme being discussed, unless the formation of districts might be regarded as preparatory. But in the spring of 1794 a curious incident took place. Several of the leading preachers, who were favourable to the scheme, desired to meet for consultation, and as they thought that the meeting would be more likely to be kept secret if it were held where there was no Methodist society, they decided upon Lichfield. They met, as Bradburn afterwards significantly reminded them, on the 1st of April. Eight persons were present—Coke, Mather, Taylor, Pawson, Bradburn, Rogers, Moore, and Adam Clarke, the last-named acting as secretary. Coke opened the business, and suggested, it is said, to ordain the other brethren there and then. It was wisely decided, however, to await the decision of Conference. These brethren then agreed to recommend the Con-

ference to institute an order of bishops, who should be called superintendents, to form the Connexion into seven or eight districts, each superintendent to watch over his district, to visit every circuit in it, to exercise discipline, and in special cases to call the President to his assistance. Coke, Mather, Pawson, Taylor, Moore, Hanby, and Bradburn were designated as the bishops, or, as they were termed, the district superintendents. At that time the country was filled with panic by rumours from France. The secret conclave excited suspicion. Were these men French spies? The hotel was watched by the police. Possibly the preachers would have been arrested had they not been recognised by a Methodist commercial traveller who was staying at the inn. Taylor gave the story in a private letter: "Mr. Benson," said he, "was not invited, and he is making a horrible stir, as though we had been consulting how to get the whole government of the Methodist Connexion into our power; and this, I suppose, he will propagate far and wide. I expect, when Thompson is informed, he will storm at no small rate."

It seems likely that this secret committee, because of its secrecy, as well as its ridiculous sequel, helped to defeat its own object. At

the following Conference the preachers rejected the proposal in whatever guise or form it was brought forward. Now it was proposed that a Building Committee should be appointed, to determine whether any chapels should be built or not; again, that men should be set apart to travel through the circuits; and again, that a committee of three should be chosen, who should be the executive head of the Connexion and live in three parts of the kingdom. The Conference would have none of it. Kilham, in his autobiography, said: "The plan of creating bishops was three times attempted during the Conference, and the design of it was discovered and opposed with success. This conflict was frequently renewed, and the measure supported by all the rhetoric of our ablest preachers, particularly such as thought themselves properly qualified to sit in Moses' chair; but we found thankfulness to God that their designs were discovered and entirely frustrated." The preachers would tolerate no episcopal rulers. They held there was no need of episcopacy. It was not scriptural. It was contrary to the itinerant system of Methodism. It would entail needless expense. It would open the door to officialism and corruption. Besides, how few could be

entrusted with such episcopal powers! The itinerant preachers would tolerate no masters. Conference was immovable. "The leading preachers of the day," says Dr. Smith, "had they been ever so strongly disposed, could no more have removed the distinctive and connexional character of Methodism and have abolished its separate existence than the Israelites could have returned to Egypt from the wilderness."

IV

THE SACRAMENT

IN 1741, says Tyerman, "the Kingswood society having been expelled from the sacramental table at Temple Church, Charles Wesley gave them the sacrament in their own humble school." From that time the two brothers frequently administered the sacrament in the old Foundery and Broadmead, and occasionally, as they had opportunity, in other Methodist meeting-houses, but never, until after John Wesley's death, was the ordinance permitted except from ordained hands. Controversy soon arose, and could not be altogether suppressed. Why, it was asked, could not Methodists receive the sacrament from their own preachers? In 1755 Thomas Walsh, Joseph Cownley, and Charles Peronnet, three of the ablest of the Methodist preachers, pleaded for the right;

and for a while it seemed as if the agitation might end in a division. The catastrophe was averted by the persuasion of Wesley. In due course it became necessary for Wesley to concede the right to America. He was informed by Asbury that thousands of children remained unbaptized, and that many members had not partaken of the sacrament for years. To meet the difficulty Wesley ordained Coke as bishop and several others as presbyters. In Scotland the difficulty appeared in another form, and Wesley was once more compelled to yield to pressure. His Journal contains the following entry: "1785, August 1st.—Having, with a few select friends, weighed the matter thoroughly, I yielded to their judgment, and set apart three of our well-tried preachers, John Pawson, Thomas Hanby, and Joseph Taylor, to minister in Scotland." Keighley, Atmore, Barber, and Cownley were ordained afterwards. Also, two or three years before he died, Wesley ordained Mather as superintendent—that is, as bishop—and Henry Moore and Thomas Rankin as presbyters, empowering them to administer the sacrament in England. Possibly one thought in his mind was that, in the event of his death, Coke and Mather, as bishops, would have

authority to ordain other Methodist preachers as might be deemed desirable. Sacerdotalism is like dry-rot; it is not easily got rid of.

These bald particulars give no idea at all of the chronic unrest of the Methodist people. For fifty years it had been kept under control, but when Wesley's controlling hand was withdrawn it broke out with ominous violence. Excepting at City Road Chapel, at Broadmead in Bristol, and possibly at one or two other places, the Methodist people were told that if they wanted the sacrament they must go to the Established Church. They were prohibited even from holding a service during Church hours. In the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1885 (p. 143) it is declared that at Great Queen Street Chapel it was actually the practice for the leaders when they desired the sacrament to bail out a clergyman from the Fleet Prison.[1] The

[1] In the winter number of the *Methodist Recorder* 1895, we are informed that in 1807 the Great Queen Street trustees passed a resolution that the travelling preachers be authorised to administer the sacraments when the "Rev. Mr. Creighton, minister of the Church of England, united to the Methodist Society and approved by the Conference," did not attend. Then follows the remark: "The shifts to which the good but benighted people of Great Queen Street were sometimes reduced are startling.

state of things throughout Methodism was rightly felt to be intolerable. Dr. Rigg seems to question whether Methodism could then be properly regarded as a Church. He says that "Wesley would not allow this great organisation to be called a Church. It was only a society—the 'United Society'—the society of 'the people called Methodists'—the 'Methodist Society.' And of its members all who were not professed Dissenters were by him reckoned as belonging to the Church of England, although a large and increasing proportion of them seldom or never attended the services of that Church." [1]

In the controversy there were two sides. On the one side there were many, perhaps a majority, of the trustees, and some of the senior preachers. These trustees were mostly Church people, brought up in the Church. They had a genuine regard for Methodism, were devoted members of society, but were prepared to resist any attempts for liberal

It is astounding that our Methodist forefathers would not allow such men as Pawson, Clarke, Mather, and Sutcliffe to perform the sacramental functions, but would rather send to the Fleet Prison for a 'pious clergyman' who was incarcerated for debt to come and administer to them the Holy Communion."

[1] *Encyc. Brit.*

changes. They looked on Methodism as a group of societies, and denied the ministerial status to its preachers. By virtue of their office they claimed a large control over the societies, and also claimed the power of veto as to the sacraments in the chapels. The preachers who supported the trustees in the controversy were such as Mather, Benson, and Thompson, who probably would not have been sorry if Methodism had been absorbed by the Church of England. On the other side was the large majority of the Methodist people. They had been converted in the Methodist society, and had derived all their spiritual good from it. They had found in the Church only bitter mockery and persecution. They knew that many of the clergy were notoriously evil livers and ignorant bigots. Also they held that the right of the sacrament had been conferred on them by Christ inalienably. Most of them were Dissenters on principle, if not by profession, and had scant respect for the supposed value of episcopal ordination. As for those preachers who supported the people they might be divided into three classes. Some of them dreaded a division, and therefore were prepared to concede the sacrament, some of them thought the time had come for their

ministerial status to be recognised, and some of them had deep convictions as to the priesthood of all believers. "The two parties in this controversy," says Dr. Smith, "stood in a very different position. The High Church party were contending simply for an opinion. The other for the needs of their spiritual experience. Of course the latter must prevail."

On the 4th of May, 1791, a circular was issued from Hull, signed by eighteen trustees, urging upon all Methodists not to profess themselves Dissenters, not to hold worship during Church hours, and not to observe sacrament in their chapels. "We believe," said they, "that those Methodists who separate from the Church of England will dwindle away into a dry, dull, and separate party." From Newcastle a counterblast was issued, written by Alexander Kilham. "Would it not be greatly to our advantage," he asked, "to have the sacrament from those ministers who daily watch over our souls in our own chapels and among our own friends? Should it be found that in some things Mr. Wesley has been mistaken, ought we not, as soon as possible, to lay those mistakes aside?" The Hull circular was followed by similar ones on the same side from Birmingham, Sheffield, and other places.

The Connexion seemed in peril of a disastrous conflagration.

The Conference met as usual in July. But what could it do? The very last thing it ought to do was to legislate hastily, and therefore, in the interests of peace, it simply resolved to "follow strictly Mr. Wesley's way." Unfortunately the controversy waxed fiercer. What was Mr. Wesley's way? Was it to keep in union with the Church of England? Or was it to observe a wise expediency and follow the openings of Providence? At the following Conference (1792) a singular course was taken, possibly in the hope of deferring the question for another year. The Conference Minutes thus describe it: "We knew not what to do, that peace and union might be preserved. At last Mr. Pawson proposed that we should commit the matter to God by putting the question to the lot. We accordingly prepared the lots; and four of us prayed. God was surely then present, yea, His glory filled the room. Almost all of the preachers were in tears. Mr. Adam Clarke was then called on to draw the lot, which was 'You shall not administer the sacrament the ensuing year.' All were satisfied. All submitted. All was peace." A resolution was then passed that

the Lord's Supper should not be administered in Methodist chapels *for one year*. There were men who doubted whether, in a case where the duty was so clear and imperative, and the teachings of Scripture were so explicit, this proceeding of casting lots could be justified. It could only be justified, they said, where there was no guide to a proper conclusion. If the intention of the Conference was to allay agitation it utterly failed. The demand for the sacrament became more peremptory. Adam Clarke said he was resolved to have liberty of conscience, or go to the ends of the earth for it. John Pawson said, "I am well satisfied that except liberty is given to those preachers and societies who wish to have the sacrament we shall have a division among the preachers and people."

At the following Conference (1793) the first step was taken. It was decided that the sacrament should be granted where the request for it was unanimous. That year nearly a hundred societies applied for the power. At the same time it was generally admitted that a resolution which placed the veto in the hands of one man in a society could not be accepted as a final settlement. The newly-formed District Meetings began to send memorials of protest. At the follow-

ing Conference (1794) the rule requiring unanimity was relaxed, and it was agreed "that the Lord's Supper shall not be administered in future where the union and concord of the Society can be preserved without it." The resolution was timid, dissuasory, and cautious, but for the time it was enough. The final result was reached the following year and embodied in the Plan of Pacification: "That the Lord's Supper shall not be administered in any chapel, except the majority of the trustees of that chapel on the one hand, and the majority of the stewards and leaders belonging to that chapel (as the best qualified to give the sense of the people) on the other hand, allow it. Nevertheless, in all cases, the consent of the Conference shall be obtained before the Lord's Supper be administered." The effect of this decision was to conciliate opposing parties in Methodism. Resistance to the will of the people gradually gave way. Separation from the Church of England was never formally decreed. It came about of itself in due course. The preachers came to be recognised as pastors, and the societies, one by one, claimed their right to partake of the sacrament. It took thirty years to complete the process, but in the end the Lord's Supper was administered in all the Methodist chapels.

V

LAY REPRESENTATION

THIS controversy was not as free from complications as it may seem to us. There were three parties concerned in it—the majority of the Methodist people, the wealthy trustees who represented the High Church party, and the preachers. This fact must be elucidated. It explains why some of the preachers who contended for the sacrament in Methodist chapels, and who were progressive in politics—as, for example, Samuel Bradburn—firmly refused the claim of the people to be represented in the Conference. It also explains why the trustees, whose sympathies were with the Established Church, supported, up to a certain point, the people in their demand for a larger share of power.

With regard to the preachers, it was hardly to be expected that they would advocate

lay-representation. Let it be kept in mind that they were the chosen representatives of Wesley. Wesley would brook no interference from the laity, and the preachers knew this perfectly well. They were the custodians of the inheritance bequeathed by him. Many of them had been trained in the High Church theory of the ministry. Also, they feared the democracy as a dangerous thing. They had troubles enough already; but who knew what would happen if they opened the Conference door to the layman? It might be like the letting in of many waters. And, last of all, let us boldly admit that, human nature being what it is, they would, of course, cling to their power. Thus it was that reverence for Wesley, respect for tradition, fear of the flood-gates of democracy, a semi-sacerdotal training, and even natural instinct, combined to influence the preachers in contending for their legal rights. By the Deed of Declaration and the posthumous letter of Wesley they were appointed to constitute the Conference, and from that position they were not to be easily ousted.

The people have been thus described: "A minority of them were members of the Established Church; others were accustomed to hear the Gospel among the

Nonconformists; but the greater mass of them were persons who had belonged to no Church, and many of them had not even been baptized."[1] The minority may be left out of our reckoning for the present. As for the rest, they had found Methodism helpful to their spiritual life, and although not all Dissenters in the sense of being opposed to the principle of a State Church, they had no reason to love the Church of England. They were Dissenters against their will, for they were compelled to register their chapels as Dissenting places of worship or else to sacrifice the benefits of the Toleration Act. It was these people who gave spiritual vitality to Methodism and did the larger share of its work. Were they always to suffer under their present disabilities? To Wesley, as their venerable father and founder, they were willing to submit; but even his rule came to be irksome. Surely, after he was gone, notwithstanding legal deeds and traditions and regulations, some change would be effected in the government of Methodism. So they hoped; and then, to their dismay, they saw that Wesley's autocracy was to be transferred intact and undiluted to the Conference.

[1] Etheridge's *Life of Adam Clarke.*

On June 14, 1791, a large meeting of Cornish Methodists was held in Redruth, and it was agreed that "an amendment of Methodist discipline was necessary." It was resolved that members should have the right of choosing their leaders, Society stewards, circuit stewards and preachers. That the Cornish Methodists did not speak only for themselves soon grew evident. At the following Conference, although Wesley had been dead only four months and a half, nearly a hundred memorials and addresses were presented from the circuits, asking for the redress of grievances.

Were these documents discussed? Not at all. They were not even read. "Nearly all, if not every one, of these memorials were burnt without having been opened."[1] John Pawson justified the action on the ground that "they were only for and against the sacrament." As a matter of fact they dealt with many grievances. It was this action which prompted Kilham to write his *Trueman and Freeman*, in which he says: "Strange to tell, upon a motion being made by a preacher whose name need not be mentioned, a majority of the Conference voted for the petitions being all destroyed

[1] Blackwell's *Life of Kilham*.

without examination. Their conduct in destroying our petitions was as gross an insult as could be offered to us. One would at least think that they are as independent of us as the State clergy are of their followers." Then he adds: "Would it not be proper for every circuit, and every district, to be represented by a delegate of its own choosing?" Petitions were destroyed also at the London Conference of 1792.[1] Evidently the agitation, which begun with certain grievances, was now ripening. The people must be represented by something better than documents. Between the preachers and the people a wide gulf was fixed.

The trustees occupied a different position from either the preachers or the unofficial members. "They represented," says Dr. Smith, "the High Church lay aristocracy of Methodism, and must be carefully distinguished from the people in general." In London, 1794, they held a Convention at which they recommended the Legal Hundred to declare for the Church of England. Of course they were opposed to those people who demanded the sacrament. Why could not such people go to Church? The trustees further demanded that the preachers,

[1] *The Monitor*, vol. i. p. 172.

not being properly ordained, should abandon all ecclesiastical titles, and should divide with them, as trustees, the administration of the societies. The famous Bristol dispute was a case in point. Starting with the sacramental question, it raised some other questions. The "old room" at Broadmead was probably the oldest Methodist chapel in the country. The trustees were of the High Church party, and one reason for the building of Portland Chapel was to "escape from their grim rule."[1] When the opening sermon was preached by Bradburn in a black gown, they, along with the Vicar, protested. Because Henry Moore, one of the ablest and saintliest of the preachers, had administered the sacrament there, they refused to admit him into the Broadmead pulpit. Rather than be associated with Portland Chapel they requested Conference to transfer Broadmead to the Bath Circuit. They then placed themselves in communication with all the Methodist trustees in the kingdom. Crucial questions were involved. Had the trustees power to prohibit the sacrament from the people? Had they the power of appointment to the pulpits? Ought not the trustees, *for the purpose of enforcing their own*

[1] *London Quarterly* for 1884.

views, to have a voice in the Conference? It was at this point, and for this end, that the trustees came into alliance with the people in demanding lay-representation in the Conference.

In 1795 an important convention of Trustees, some representing the High Church party and a few the liberal party, was held in Manchester, concurrently with the Conference. The one point on which they were agreed was that the preachers had too much power. On all other points they were hopelessly divided. For all that, so great was their influence that the Conference appointed a committee to interview them, in order to devise some scheme of compromise. At last a basis of agreement was reached, which became known as "The Plan of Pacification." The most important of the mutual concessions agreed upon were (1) that the sacraments must be determined by a majority of the trustees and leaders, the consent of the Conference being also necessary; (2) that the appointment of preachers should remain with the Conference; (3) that the preachers should be amenable to discipline before a meeting of preachers in the District, of trustees and officials of the circuit; (4) the preachers were not to appoint or remove a

leader without first consulting the Leaders' Meeting; and (5) that no pamphlet was to be written or circulated anonymously." For the time all professed themselves satisfied.

Still the agitation in the societies continued. Accordingly, in 1796, a second meeting of trustees' delegates was held. It met in London at the time of the Conference. It reported that "jealousies were spreading through the Connexion, and that one principal cause was the want of a fuller communication between the circuits and the Conference," and it recommended to the Conference "that delegates meet with preachers in the District Meetings and Conference." Other points were mentioned bearing on the self-government of the Churches. In July, 1797, a third meeting of trustees' delegates was held at Leeds, again concurrently with the Conference. About seventy were present. They had come for the express purpose of making to the Conference a deliberate, but unfortunately quite useless, request for lay representation. The negotiations were opened on August 3rd. Three overtures were made successively to the Conference. Would the preachers admit two or more representatives from each District Meeting to meet with them in Conference?

Certainly not, was the answer. Might delegates be admitted into the District Meetings to co-operate with the preachers? No. What, then, if lay delegates were to assemble at the time of the Conference, not with the preachers, but as a kind of second legislative house, whose consent should be necessary before any new law could be carried into effect? No, not even that. These proposals having been rejected, it was resolved by Conference as follows: "The Conference having maturely considered the subject, are thoroughly persuaded, with many of our societies whose addresses were read this day, that they cannot admit any but travelling preachers into their body, and preserve the system of Methodism entire, particularly the itinerant plan." In vain the laymen knocked at the door.

So far, then, as the Wesleyan Conference was concerned, the question of lay representation was closed. Apart from this, it must be admitted that the Conference made important concessions by way of completing the compromise agreed upon in 1795. The "Plan of Pacification," sometimes called the "Charter of Methodism," was then finally agreed upon, all the members of the Con-

ference being required to append their signatures to it—all, except two or three Liberal stalwarts, who, rather than sign, left the Conference.

The main points of this historic document, as finally completed in 1797, may be briefly stated.[1] The Conference retained the right of appointment. It promised to publish annual financial statements. No person was to be admitted into the Church if the Leaders' Meeting declared him unsuitable, and no member expelled unless the charges against him were proved at a Leaders' Meeting. No steward or leader could be appointed or displaced except with the consent of the Leaders' Meeting, and no local preacher could be placed on the plan except with the consent of the Preachers' Meeting. If at any time the Conference should deem it proper to enact any new rule for the societies, and such rule should be objected to in the first Quarterly Meeting in any circuit, and if the majority of the meetings, in conjunction with the preachers, were of opinion that the enforcement of the rule would be injurious to the prosperity of the circuit, it need not be enforced before the next Conference. The new rule, however, was

[1] Stevens, ii. 287.

not to be made a cause of contention. Publications were not to be issued, nor public meetings held, likely to create strife. Some of these points were concessions made by the preachers, and some were concessions made by the people.

What, then, was the net result? What for practical purposes, did the Plan of Pacification mean? To conservative minds it seemed at the time to amount almost to a revolution. Henry Moore was so alarmed at the concessions made by the preachers that he threatened to resign. He said: "The strangest thing that ever occurred among a body of men has now occurred in the Methodist Conference: they have conceded by one act all their authority." The Conference of 1797 itself declared, in an address to the people: "We have given up to you by far the greater part of the superintendent's authority." On further reflection it became obvious to calm observers that this was the one thing the preachers had not given up. Pastoral supremacy remained untouched. Dr. Smith states the fact precisely: "The integrity of the Conference, as consisting only of itinerant preachers, the authority of the pastorate and the validity of the District Meetings were fully established and recog-

nised as essential elements of the Methodist economy. They were made unchangeable and perpetual, and incapable of alteration, except by an entire revolution of the whole system." The learned historian was right. The preachers still held the key. For eighty years the Wesleyan Conference continued to be a secret conclave of preachers, and during that period no layman crossed the threshold---unless, indeed, he was admitted like some errand-boy, who, when he had discharged his task, was conducted back to the door.

VI

THE METHODIST NEW CONNEXION

TO the High Church trustees the Plan of Pacification, while, of course, it did not bring unalloyed satisfaction, certainly brought some reason for not pressing their claims further. What they wanted was representation in the Conference; but they wanted it for their own ends; no principle whatever was involved in it; and, as they could not get it, they were not prepared to carry things to an extremity. The Plan of Pacification afforded them an excellent cover of retreat. If they could not succeed they would submit. Alas! the root of the matter was not in those men. Would that it had been! If they had entered into the scriptural idea of the Church; if they had realised the God-given right of the brother-

hood to govern itself, instead of being governed by a ministerial order ; if, by virtue of this, the demand for lay representation had been in them a principle rather than a time-serving policy; if they had refused in their three conventions to be content with concessions, or dazzled by diplomacy, or conciliated by compromise ; if they had refused throughout to accept any substitute for the real and essential thing ; if they had thus stood firm, not only would they have gained the victory over the preachers, but they would have made a nobler Methodist history, and undoubtedly have saved it from the tragedy of its disruptions, for they would have built up a Conference established on the will of the Methodist people.

From these trustees the godly minority turned away, and on the 3rd of August, when the Leeds Conference had finally refused lay representation, they held a meeting in Ebenezer Chapel. They could accept no priestly domination. To them it was unscriptural. In addition to this, they were deeply moved by the expulsion of Alexander Kilham, which had taken place at the previous Conference. They were now prepared for the worst. They drew up a Declaration, in which they said to the Conference : " If the preachers can unite with us upon this or any

other plan (of lay representation), we shall exceedingly rejoice, but if they are resolved not to do it—*we must divide.*" On August 5th they received a bald acknowledgment from the Conference, together with a copy of the rules. Four days later, August 9, 1797, the Methodist New Connexion was born, its first President being William Thom, and its first Secretary, Alexander Kilham.

William Thom was one of the few preachers who left the Conference when it decided not to grant lay representation. A calm, silent, resolute man, with an eminently judicial mind, he formed his views slowly, and, at the proper moment, acted upon them. For twenty-two years he had laboured as a Wesleyan preacher, and now for fourteen years he was to labour as a Methodist New Connexion preacher. A Scotchman intimately acquainted with Presbyterianism, he did more than any other man to shape the polity of the new body after the Presbyterian model. He died in 1811.

If William Thom was the statesmen of the Methodist New Connexion, Alexander Kilham was its prophet. Kilham was born at Epworth in 1762, and was received by Wesley in 1785. In the very month that Wesley died he, as a Dissenter, felt it his

duty to refuse to have his child baptized in the Established Church. The first address issued in favour of the Methodist sacrament was written by his pen. As the call came, he wrote pamphlet after pamphlet—*Trueman and Freeman*, *Aquila and Priscilla*, *Martin Luther*, *Paul and Silas*, and several others—all advocating a larger freedom for the Methodist people. Never in Methodism was there a man more intensely hated by the preachers. Dr. Coke moved his expulsion in the Conference of 1792. "After much altercation," says Kilham, "they passed on me a censure for imprudence, saying that what I had written was calculated to ruin our Connexion *with the Established Church*." Still he advocated the cause of the people. He had the vision of a seer and the courage of a reformer. His writings were equal, in their nervous, racy Saxon, to those of Cobbett. His literary art was all the greater because it was not artificial. He sacrificed himself for the truth. Gradually the hostile forces grew stronger, and in 1796 the crisis came. Although not one stain rested on his beautiful character, the Conference, after having refused to furnish him with a copy of the charges preferred against him, pronounced him guilty, and then expelled him. The only copy of

charges he received was supplied to him privately and informally by the good Adam Clarke. While the so-called trial was proceeding he received a letter from his wife: "If I could bear more of thy burden for thee than I do my heart would rejoice, even mine. None can be more willing to help, though many are more able. May the Lord bless thee, and send me help from heaven." Bradburn's conduct was a masterpiece of treachery. In April, 1795, he wrote to Kilham: "Fear not my firmness to the side I have espoused and endeavoured to help forward. We have really nothing to fear; the people are radix of all power in our Connexion, and they are not to be trifled with any longer." Fifteen months later he stood at the Conference table to see that all his brethren signed for Kilham's expulsion.[1]

"After I had served the Connexion twelve years," Kilham wrote, "and the preachers never attempted to charge me with anything immoral, yet they expelled me. My wife had never received a farthing for quarterage, and yet they turned her out of house and harbour without allowing one shilling, either to remove from Alnwick, or to

[1] Bradburn was not a man of much moral stamina. I refer to the episode of 1802.

begin housekeeping with, in any place. Now I appeal whether these things were not enough to break a heart of stone?"

He lived only about two years and a half after his expulsion, but during that brief period he laid the foundations of the Methodist New Connexion. His labours were apostolic. Three times every Sunday, and almost every night in the week, he was preaching in different parts of the country. Eight days before his death a bone stuck in his throat, and the report was industriously spread that this was the cause of his death. The truth is, he died of a rapid consumption, hastened by trouble and overwork. He passed away on December 20, 1798, at the age of thirty-six. As he lay dying he exclaimed: "What I have done in the Methodist Connexion, so far from repenting, I rejoice in at this moment. I bless God that He made me an instrument of doing it. Oh, that I had done it more faithfully." His last words were: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" The epitaph carved upon his tomb was as true as it was beautiful: "Deserted by many of his friends, he lived to see the cause flourish in which he died a martyr. In promoting the glory of God and the happiness of his brethren, he counted nothing too dear a

sacrifice." Alexander Kilham was the first, and, take him all in all, he was the greatest of the Methodist Reformers.

Disappointment has been expressed that after all the long agitation only 5,000 members should withdraw from the Wesleyan community, and this disappointment is not unnatural. It is considerably lessened, however, when we enter into all the circumstances of the case; as, for example, when we reflect that the means of communication were extremely scant; that there were no railways, no penny post, no newspapers; that the members in rural districts were almost inaccessible; that the wealthier members dreaded the loss of chapel property; that others dreaded the horrors of division; that all of them were reluctant to break away from old and precious associations; that, for the spiritual good they had received, they loved their preachers, and were open to persuasion; that secession might imperil the souls of their children; and, finally, that it is one thing to assent to a principle, but another to be ready to suffer for it. These considerations help us to appreciate the heroism of the brave 5,000. It was never expected by their enemies that they would be able to hold together. How could they build new chapels

and sustain a paid itinerancy? In spite of difficulties, however, the 5,000 steadily increased, and now have become nearly 40,000, notwithstanding that at one crisis they sacrificed one-fourth of their numbers, and much valuable chapel property, for the sake of the evangelical faith, and at other stages have given thousands of members in Canada and Australia to the cause of Methodist Union.

That the polity of the new denomination was so essentially reasonable and moderate—framed, as I have said, on Presbyterian lines—was due largely to the experience and wisdom of William Thom and Alexander Kilham. As to its details, it was allowed to develop slowly. In 1825, when the Connexional Trust Deed for Chapels was prepared, and in 1846, when the Deed Poll was adopted, the polity assumed its final shape. It embodied and, as far as was practicable, it combined two principles—the autonomy of the circuit and the representative constitution of the Conference. Succinctly stated it is as follows: The Church Meeting, composed of all the adult members, has power to sanction and recognise the admission of members, to elect stewards, to recommend candidates for the ministry, and to appoint representatives to

the Leaders' Meetings. The Leaders' Meeting is composed of circuit ministers, class leaders, officers, and representatives. It attends to the general affairs of the Church. The Circuit Quarterly Meeting, elected directly by the Churches or indirectly through the Leaders' Meetings, admits local preachers, transacts the business of the circuit, and appoints representatives to the Conference. The Conference is the sovereign power of the denomination. It is composed equally of ministers and laymen, and all are circuit representatives, with the exception of treasurers and secretaries of the different institutions, and twenty-four Guardian Representatives elected by the Conference. The circuit minister is ex-officio chairman in all the local courts, except at Trustees' Meetings, at which, however, he usually presides.

The denomination has advanced step by step. Within twenty-five years of its formation it had, against tremendous odds, doubled its membership. In 1836 it sent its first missionary to Canada, and in 1859 it sent its first missionaries, John Innocent and William Nelthorpe Hall, to Tientsin, in North China. In 1872 the Canadian Churches, numbering 241, with over 8,000 members, became united with the "Methodist Church

of Canada." The China Mission is prosperous and well equipped. It has extended far beyond its original borders, and has now a membership of 2,738, with 1,634 on trial. The name of John Innocent, who died recently, is held in honour by all evangelical Christendom. Ranmoor College was erected in 1864, at a cost of nearly £9,000, the larger part of which had been bequeathed by Mr. Thomas Firth, of Sheffield. It is also well endowed. The names of Stacey, Cocker, and Crothers will always be associated with the great work done by this College. The greatest New Connexion theologian was William Cooke, although his writings are now but rarely read. Thomas Allin was also a theological writer of high standing. Among those who have sprung from this remarkable body may be named General Booth, and Sir Robert Hart, who for a generation has controlled the finances of China.

VII

PRIMITIVE METHODISM

ON the 31st of May, 1807, at the historic camp meeting on Mow Cop, a hill on the border-line of Cheshire and Staffordshire, one of the sources of the Trent, and almost within sight of Macclesfield to the north, and the Potteries to the south, Primitive Methodism commenced its course. The morning was drizzly. Many thousands of people came together, not only from the neighbourhood, but from the Potteries, Warrington, Knutsford, and other towns. The meeting continued nearly the whole of the day, beginning not long after sunrise and concluding at sunset. There was little formal preaching, but a series of exhortations, testimonies, and impromptu expositions; also there were "permanent praying companies which did not break up for the preaching." It was a

time of never-to-be-forgotten emotion. The leaders were William Clowes and Hugh Bourne—the former as speaker and the latter as the organiser; but in truth the meeting was sustained by scores of good men who exhorted or prayed as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Why this memorable occasion should be assumed to be the birth-hour of Primitive Methodism is difficult to say, for open-air services had been held on Mow Cop for several years, and the movement was not organised until two or three years later. Probably the instinct of the Primitive Methodist people was right. The meeting had for them great historical significance. Somehow it had struck the keynote. All the enthusiasm of this wonderful people, all their love of liberty, and their genius for evangelism were then indicated unmistakably, and perhaps also we may add, prophetically, on that eventful day.

In 1800 Hugh Bourne, then twenty-seven years of age, had come to live at Mow. He was a shy, taciturn, reserved, introspective man, not unlike George Fox the Quaker. He had joined the Methodists at Ridgway the year before. Grieved by the godless condition of the people, he broke through his

reserve and began to speak to them individually. He then started a cottage prayer-meeting. In 1801 he was pressed to preach in the cottage, but so many came to hear him that the meeting had to be held out of doors. A revival broke out in the village, which spread far and wide, and reached even Tunstall. Similar revivals just then had started, almost unaccountably, in many places. About that time Lorenzo Dow, an erratic American preacher, who had laboured with extraordinary results in Vermont, and afterwards in Ireland, found his way to Staffordshire. He preached everywhere in the open air. Enthusiasm always works unexpectedly; it cannot be tied up with red-tape; it will not conform to usage and conventionalism. So it was with the new movement. It broke through religious decorum; reproduced the American camp meeting; interfered with circuit arrangements; and even permitted women to preach. Accordingly the Conference of 1807, two months after the Mow Cop camp meeting, resolved that camp meetings, even supposing they were allowable in America, were highly improper in England and likely to produce considerable mischief.

A camp meeting had already been arranged

for by Bourne and his friends at Norton on August 23rd. Was it to be held in face of what the Conference had done? Bourne argued that "the Lord could turn the minds of the Conference or carry on camp meetings by some other means." Camp meetings, cottage services, house-to-house visitation, and female preaching continued as if nothing had occurred, and the people came to be known as Camp-meeting Methodists.

This revolt against Conference authority must be punished. So on June 27, 1808, at Burslem, Bourne was expelled by the superintendent, technically for not attending class, but really for taking part in camp meetings. When, on the following day, he was told of his expulsion, he simply said, "The Lord's will be done!" He wrote in his diary: "I went to Tunstall (July 8, 1808). J. Nixon discoursed with me about being out of the Society. I said I ought to have had an opportunity to have answered for myself. He said I should endeavour to come in again. I said I left it to the Lord. He said I should have more privileges. I said, as it was, I should have the privilege of doing the Lord's will. He said, if I did that I should be a happy man; nevertheless he thought I ought to talk with —— about it, to prevent him from acting hastily

another time. We then talked of the deep things of religion." Such was the man who had to be put out of a Methodist Church. Clowes' turn came next. Deterred by Bourne's expulsion, Clowes had taken very little part in camp meetings for a year or two, but he could no longer silence his conscience. Let him tell the story. "September, 1810. When Mr. Aikenhead, the travelling preacher, came to renew the tickets, as the leader I gave him my class-book to call over the names as usual, but in calling over the names he passed by my name, which stood first on the paper and called the rest in order. The night following he called a Leaders' Meeting. I stopped at the meeting in my official character, and ventured to inquire what I had done amiss that my ticket had been withheld, for no charge had been officially brought against me. I was then told that my name had been left off the plan because I had attended camp meetings; that I was no longer with them, and that the matter was ended. I therefore immediately delivered up my class papers to the meeting and became unchurched." All the members of his two classes left with him. On April 6, 1811, James Steele, who became another of the founders of Primitive Methodism, was simi-

larly expelled. His offence was that of having attended a love-feast conducted by Clowes. Without any notice of trial James Steele, the Sunday School superintendent, local preacher, trustee, chapel steward, and leader of two large classes, was dismissed from the Society by the travelling preacher. It is necessary to relate these painful incidents. They explain why Primitive Methodism became a separate body, and to some extent, as we shall see, they explain its polity.

In 1811, Bourne, Clowes, and Steele, with their followers, numbering about 200, came together as the Tunstall Circuit. Although the next year, to quote Hugh Bourne, "we took the name of Primitive Methodists," there was as yet no dream of a new denomination. Banished from their Wesleyan home, they were concerned chiefly lest the revival should die out. The members of the societies, men and women alike, became evangelists and found their way to the outlying villages, and wherever they made converts they established societies. "Primitive Methodism," says the Rev. H. B. Kendall, "was rural in its origin; it took kindly and naturally to the villages, and lingered among them lovingly. Village evangelism became its habit." Soon the Tunstall Circuit became too large. In 1816

the Derby Circuit (or Nottingham, as it was afterwards named) was formed, and in 1818 the Loughborough Circuit. Even now there was no prearranged scheme to form a Methodist body, yet within eleven years after the Mow Cop camp meeting, here it was, a Methodist body, definitely named and including three circuits. In a singular fashion the work beginning at the source of the Trent followed the river in its course from Mow Cop to Hull. Hull was reached in 1819, but in the meanwhile village societies had been formed throughout the Midlands, and simultaneously there were excursions into Lancashire and the north. In 1843 the General Missionary Committee was established ; the wonderful work had extended to almost every county, and the membership had increased in thirty-two years from 200 to 85,625. All this progress was made in the midst of extreme poverty and against almost incredible persecution. The zeal of those old Primitive Methodist preachers was apostolic. The text on the first Society Class ticket, issued in 1811, was: "We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest ; for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against." The Primitive Methodist people were everywhere spoken against, but

they endured obloquy without murmuring, yea, they adorned it by their saintliness of life and their glorious passion for doing good.

The polity was formed, one might say, piecemeal. Primitive Methodism was at first co-extensive with the Tunstall Circuit. It immediately found a name, partly by accident, and partly of necessity. The society ticket was before even the name. As the Churches multiplied it was decided by Bourne and his friends to set apart some of the preachers, paying them a few shillings a week to buy food. A new ecclesiastical polity was in the making before anybody had perfectly realised the fact. The first Conference was in 1820, but twelve months before, in Nottingham, a preparatory meeting was held, which, although not called a Conference, was probably the most important of all the Conferences. Only fifteen delegates were present, but they fixed once for all the main outlines of the constitution. They framed rules for the government of the circuits; they decided that the stewards should be appointed, not by the members, but by the leaders; and they also agreed that the Conference should be composed of representatives in the proportion of two laymen to one minister. In 1821 the circuits were

grouped into districts, the four districts at the first being Tunstall, Nottingham, Hull, and Sunderland. Out of these all the other districts have been carved. Circuit representation soon gave place to District representation, and the influence of the District Meeting steadily increased, to the immense benefit of the Connexion. In 1830 the Deed Poll was duly executed, legalising the Connexion and securing its property. It was formally approved by the Leicester Conference of 1831.

A polity so constructed could not but have its incongruities. Every detail of it was decided upon with a view to some practical advantage. On the one side we may be surprised that the Church meeting should hold so subordinate a position; and on the other we are impressed with the preponderating influence and power of the laymen. The truth is that the Primitive Methodist founders, because they were practical statesmen and had to deal with untrained, inexperienced members, were compelled to entrust the administration of the societies almost entirely to their leaders. At the same time they always carried about with them the bitter memory of the expulsions. Never again, so far as they could prevent it, should the

preachers be able to usurp priestly despotic powers. They were not to be the ex-officio chairmen of their meetings. They were not to form a majority in their Conferences or District Meetings. Pastoral supremacy had driven the Primitive Methodists into the wilderness. It must not be tolerated now that they had become a powerful denomination.

To-day Primitive Methodism, with its 210,000 members, its cultured ministry, its missionary undertakings, its powerful organisations and resources, is splendidly democratic in its sympathies, its aspirations, and its programmes. It is now preparing for the celebration of its Centenary. A large fund is to be raised, and schemes are being considered for further extension. Through the liberality of Mr. W. P. Hartley and others, the College in Manchester has already become one of the finest and best-equipped in English Nonconformity. The leaders of this noble church (both ministers and laymen) are sagacious in counsel and broad in their sympathies. Possibly at no distant date they will be prepared to consider proposals of union, which, when carried into effect, will put a new face on British Methodism.

VIII

THE BIBLE CHRISTIANS

THE Mecca of the Bible Christian people is Shebbear, on the borders of Dartmoor, in the north-west of Devonshire. It was in Lake Farmhouse, in this parish, on the memorable 9th of October, 1815, that Wm. O'Bryan, without any plan or even a desire on his part, and after much persuasion, formed the first Bible Christian society, when twenty-two persons gave in their names. It was here that the Thorne family lived—John Thorne, the father, who was led to the Saviour by Daniel Evans, the evangelical curate; Mary Thorne, his wife, who after her conversion stood up in her pew in the parish church and gave her testimony: "The Lord hath forgiven all my sins and the blessed Spirit hath given me the witness of it;" and, above all, James Thorne, their

son, then about twenty years of age, pre-eminent among his brothers and sisters, and destined to be, next to Wm. O'Bryan, the most influential man in the Bible Christian community. On this farm was built the first Bible Christian chapel, and here, too, on the 26th of July, 1817, was commenced the first Sunday School in the denomination. The Shebbear College, devoted both to the higher education of boys and the training of the ministry, has long been a centre of culture and Connexional patriotism, and in 1891 Chief Justice Way, D.C.L., LL.D., of South Australia, acquired Lake Farm and generously presented it to the College and the Connexion. It is therefore towards this sacred spot that the thoughts of all Bible Christians who know their history and love their fellowship are naturally drawn.

William O'Bryan was born at Gunwen, in the parish of Luxillian, in Cornwall, on the 6th of February, 1778. In 1801, five years after his conversion, he, like Tauler, Wesley, Chalmers, and many others, passed through a momentous spiritual crisis, in which he saw, as he had never done before, the mystery of redeeming grace. "At that moment," said he, "I longed for the whole world, if possible, to be gathered together that I might rush in

among them." On the next Sunday young O'Bryan rose in the Methodist chapel and—to use Mr. F. W. Bourne's striking phrase—"bore witness against himself and for God." Before that year closed about seventy people in the neighbourhood gave themselves to Christ. He laboured incessantly, and, like Wesley, always went first to those who needed him most.

For these "glorious irregularities" he was expelled by the Methodist preacher. He has himself told the story.[1] About 1808, or thereabouts, he had preached at Newquay, then a poor, neglected fishing village, and of necessity his converts had been formed into a society. They built a small preaching house, but unfortunately they had that summer a bad season, "no pilchards appearing on the coast," and they could hardly find money for bread. At the next Quarterly Meeting, although they had not been placed on the plan, it was made a ground of complaint against them that they had not paid their "quarterage," and O'Bryan pleaded for them an exemption. "As they were my charge I pleaded in their behalf that it was more reasonable to send them a few pounds as a present to help them in their trying circumstances than to take

[1] *Bible Christian Magazine*, July, 1905.

money from them." For this he was expelled. "In the month of November, 1810," says F. W. Bourne, "he was formally excluded from the Methodist Society, in the chapel of which he had given the freehold, for no crime, unless his irregular attempts to save souls can be construed into one." A travelling preacher then went to Newquay, and after preaching to the people told them that "O'Bryan was out of the Methodist Connexion." "He kept back the cause, as if it were a crime too bad to be published." He then threatened them that unless they paid the quarterage immediately they should have no more preaching. By some means they raised the money, but the society was scattered and destroyed.

The great evangelist was humble as a child, and eventually joined the Methodist Society at St. Blazey. On Sundays and week-days alike he was preaching in the Devonshire villages, and the revival spread like a fire. Then came the second expulsion. "The superintendent of the St. Austell Circuit," says F. W. Bourne, "finding on his renewal of tickets that Mr. O'Bryan had not met in class for three weeks, withheld his ticket on this flimsy pretext, so that he was deemed once more to be out of the Society, and was told, as on the first occasion, that he had not

been excluded, but that he had excluded himself." Twice expelled, he once more made overtures with a view to his return to the Methodist Society, but was told that he would not be accepted unless he consented to abandon his work.

It was after this painful experience that he was constrained at Shebbear to establish the first Bible Christian Society. The societies multiplied with extraordinary rapidity. At the first Quarterly Meeting, which was held on New Year's Day, 1816, it was reported that the membership, which began with 22, had increased to 237. Seven years later it had increased to 5,050. At first the revival spread through the villages round about Shebbear, but soon the whole of Devonshire and Cornwall was affected from one end to the other. In 1819 the first Conference, attended by twelve itinerant preachers and probably as many laymen, was held at Baddash, Launceston. The next year a mission was opened in Kent, and societies were established at Chatham and Sheerness; the following year another mission was opened in the Scilly Islands, and the year after that an attack was made upon London. The work was already extending through Somerset. In 1823 it reached the Isle of

Wight, and, a few weeks later, the Channel Islands. Causes were established also in Brighton, Lewes, Portsmouth, Exeter, Plymouth, and other important towns. Within ten years after its origin the good work extended from Sheerness, through all the southern counties, to the extreme west of Cornwall. It was named, as it were, by accident. "On the 26th of August, 1816, a friend informed Mr. O'Bryan that his people were called Bible Christians." "When we were called by that name," says he, "I took it, and that it might be better known what we were I joined Arminian to it, and after that day we were called Arminian Bible Christians." The word Arminian was dropped a few years later. The name was in itself a tribute to the saintly character of the people.

What was more significant even than their name was their missionary enterprise. Within six years of its commencement this heroic Church, although poor and feeble, resolved to carry the Gospel abroad "as Divine Providence might open the way." From 1821 to 1865 it raised £70,000, and James Thorne, for many years its missionary treasurer, used to say that "for every pound given a soul had been saved." In 1830 a labouring man who

had just found Christ asked his brother, "Have the Bible Christians any missionaries abroad?" and he gave £10 out of his savings. That year two missionaries were sent to British North America; and then, as the call came, missionaries were sent to Australia and New Zealand. In all these colonies Methodist Union has been effected, and towards the attainment of that happy issue the Bible Christian missionaries, by their enlightened advocacy and broad sympathies, contributed in no small degree. In 1885 missionaries were sent to China, to Yunnan, the most south-west province, far away up the great river Yang-tse. "To-day there are eleven duly-appointed missionaries (including those missionaries' wives who went out in the first instance as agents), five native evangelists, and three local preachers now in the field."

Except for a brief unhappy period the history of this denomination has not been disturbed by questions of polity. From the first the liberal instincts of the people have prevailed. At the Conference of 1823 it was resolved to "enrol a deed to identify the Conference that Chapel Trusts might be suitably settled," and then, also, the Conference was divided into districts. The

Conference is "the organ of government," and its members, with certain exceptions, are elected by the District Meetings. Every fifth year, the District Meetings must send an equal number of laymen and ministers "in order to prevent priestly domination from obtaining in the Connexion." In other years the number of lay members is limited by the Poll Deed to one from each district, but since 1877 the districts have been empowered to appoint "permissive" lay representatives equal in number to the ministers, on condition that the business transacted by the Conference thus constituted shall be confirmed by a vote of the "legal" members. The practical result is that not only in the fifth years, but year by year the Conference consists of an equal number of ministers and laymen. As in all other liberal Methodist bodies, the Circuit Quarterly Meeting has an ex-officio and an elective element. Within the limits of the Church all power and authority reside ultimately in the Church Meeting. It receives or excludes members, elects Church officers, appoints representatives to the Elders' Meeting, which is equivalent to the Leaders' Meeting in other Methodist bodies, and where no Elders' Meeting is held, it appoints Class Leaders.

The Elders' Meeting transacts the general business of the Church.

In this brief sketch it has not been possible for me to portray the many remarkable personalities who stand out in Bible Christian history—men like William Reed, four times President, son of the Reeds of Holwell, an apostolic preacher who spent many a night in prayer and who was as prudent in counsel as he was eloquent in speech; or William Bailey, racy, humorous, happy, irresistible, always ready to face a mob or, if need were, to sleep out at night so that he might win souls for Christ; or Billy Bray, "so popular a preacher, so joyous a saint, and so great a spiritual genius;" or F. W. Bourne, who was Billy Bray's biographer, a leader in the cause of Methodist Union, and whose wise statesmanship was made beautiful by his fine spiritual experience and evangelical passion.

Only a passing reference can be made to the extraordinary fact that in the early history of the body the boldest pioneers were women. Johanna Brooks was instrumental in the conversion of hundreds, and for forty-three years was a member of the Connexion. It was Mary Toms who carried the Gospel to the Isle of Wight in 1823. She was compelled to spend her first night in the streets because

she could not get lodgings. It was Catherine Reed who went all alone to evangelise London. She was much comforted by the text which caught her eye as she was reading her Bible—"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the *woman* which testified, He told me all things that ever I did." It was Mary Ann Werrey who, of all Bible Christians, first preached the Gospel in the Scilly Isles in 1821, and at Guernsey in 1823. Her courage was magnificent. "Methinks," said she, "I hear the shouts of victory before the battle begins." Catherine O'Bryan, Elizabeth Dart, Mary Cottle, Mary Hewett, Ann Vickery, and many other good women, took their part in the heroic work of those early eventful years.

Among all these, however, James Thorne stands as by far the most conspicuous figure. It was mainly through him that, in the critical times when O'Bryan began to betray his limitations and to lay claim to autocracy, the Connexion was saved. He was the Bible Christian statesman, as liberal as he was strong, and as progressive as he was wary—"the most courageous and trusted leader of his Church, who was more closely identified with every phase of its work

for a longer period than any of his contemporaries or successors." The year 1895 was observed by the Bible Christians as the centenary celebration of his birth.

IX

GROWTH OF WESLEYAN METHODISM

IT has been conclusively proved that Alexander Kilham, Hugh Bourne, and William O'Bryan, who, with their followers, were banished from their Church, were not self-seeking and self-assertive democrats. They loved Methodism dearly, and their course of action was the outcome of deep spiritual convictions. Some of them were saints of a very beautiful type. Nor must we be unfair to the leaders of the Conference. Mistaken as was their ecclesiastical ideal, they lived near to God. Joseph Benson, for example, a veritable champion of the High Church party, set out for Cornwall at the height of his troubles in Bristol, and during a single month preached forty sermons to at

least sixty thousand hearers, and hundreds, if not thousands, were brought to Christ. Dr. Coke was perhaps the greatest missionary Methodism has produced, and died at sea on his way as a missionary to India. The death-chamber of Alexander Mather was filled with the Divine glory. Benson and Pawson tells us that when they knelt to pray with him "they could do little more than weep in silence." Some of his last words were: "O Jesus, whom I have long loved, whom I do love, in whom I delight, I surrender myself to Thee." It is not a necessary inference that a man who wanted to see Methodism absorbed into the Church of England, or see the Methodist Conference remain exclusively ministerial, was therefore a man of inferior character. The same criticism may be made with reference to the people. Dr. Smith speaks of the men who left Methodism in 1797 as "enemies to its prosperity," and language almost as harsh has been used about the men who did not leave. Let us have done with these vituperations. The truth is, that, for the most part, all these men, whatever side of the controversy they took, were sincere good Methodists, to whom the Gospel was a personal experience, and who lived for the

conversion of souls. Polity counts for much, but not for everything.

From this point of view we are able to understand the abounding prosperity which Wesleyan Methodism enjoyed, almost without a break, for nearly half a century. The time was one of great revivals. In Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, Bristol, London, and elsewhere, rarely was a sermon preached without conversions. The Cornwall revival in 1814, says Dr. Smith, "was one of the most remarkable ever known in this or any other country." The results of these revivals throughout Methodism were apparent for more than a generation. From 1791 to 1805 the increase in membership was about 60,000, representing an average gain of more than 4,000 every year. In 1815 the membership (including Canada and the foreign stations) was 230,000, and in 1825 it was 280,000. In thirty-four years it had more than trebled.

There was a corresponding advance in missionary enterprise. In 1804 the first Missionary Committee was appointed, consisting of all the preachers in London. "It was rendered necessary by the increasing magnitude of the missionary operations which could no longer be managed by the single agency of Dr. Coke." In 1813 were

sent the first Methodist missionaries to India. Coke, who was at their head, died on the voyage. About that time the first missionary society was formed at Leeds, and the example of Leeds was quickly followed all over the Connexion. The Pastoral Address of the Conference of 1821 says, "The work has spread from the West Indies and the North American Colonies to West and South Africa, Ceylon, Continental India and the Pacific Ocean." By that time there were probably 30,000 communicants abroad. The first Methodist class meeting in Australia met in 1812, and the first preacher was a young Irish convict who had found the Saviour. From Australia the work extended to the Friendly Isles, the Fiji Islands, and New Zealand. Besides this there were mission stations in France, Spain, and other parts of the Continent. These statistics refer, of course, to pre-centenary days. It is impossible to express all that they mean. But certainly they do mean that evangelism at home and throughout the world was the very genius of Methodism. As was said at the historic meeting at Leeds in 1813, Methodism is "a revival Church in its spirit and a missionary Church in its organisation."

Those were the days of Bramwell and

Carvosso, of Samuel Hick and William Dawson, of Richard Watson and Adam Clarke, of Samuel Drew and Thomas Olivers, of Daniel Isaac, Treffrey, Robert Newton, and Bunting. In this strangely diversified group the four commanding figures, without doubt, are those of Adam Clarke, Richard Watson, Robert Newton, and Jabez Bunting. To the credit of Bunting let it be recorded that he was an enthusiast in missionary work, was one of the organisers of the Leeds missionary meeting in 1813, and succeeded Dr. Coke as secretary. Robert Newton was the popular preacher. He is said to have preached on more than 14,000 special occasions, and wherever he went the crowds were overwhelming. His whole stock consisted of very few sermons, some of which were preached hundreds of times during a period of thirty years. To the present generation his popularity is almost incomprehensible. His printed sermons are mediocre and jejune; but it is said that to compensate for his poverty of mind he had a noble presence, a flashing eye, a fine bonhommie, and a musical voice incomparable in the variety and sweetness of its modulation. He was President four times. Richard Watson was the theologian, philosophic, profound, and

logical. His *Theological Dictionary*, and particularly his *Institutes*, not to speak of his other writings, formed a landmark in Methodist theology. In the pulpit, and occasionally in his writings, he rose to lofty heights of eloquence. He died at the early age of fifty-one years. Adam Clarke was the scholar, yet much more than that. He was chivalrous, generous, catholic, open-minded, the friend of struggling causes, never seeking office and place, and never stooping to do a mean deed. With his first half-guinea, found in a garden, he bought a Hebrew grammar; then learned Hebrew, Persian, Arabic, Sanscrit, and the Aryan and Semitic tongues generally. His Commentary occupied him nearly forty years. He was recognised by the Government as one of the most learned men in the land, and was frequently engaged in State duties. He hardly ever preached a second time on the same text. Often deeply grieved by the treatment meted out to him by Bunting, he remained gracious and forgiving to the end. His appearance at sixty years of age has been thus described: "His hair is white; he has a ruddy, healthful complexion; his person is rather above the middle size, but not corpulent; he has a Scotch-Irish appearance and brogue, but is

masterly in speaking, energetic, yet plain. He wears a short blue coat, black vest, and small clothes; grey stockings with shoes." Daniel Isaac was the controversialist, original, subtle, and combative. His *Ecclesiastical Claims*, which was liberal in its teachings, was solemnly censured by the Conference of 1816, and was never sold at the Book Room, because, as Smith says, "it impugned the Wesleyan theory of the ministry." William Bramwell was the most powerful evangelist of his day, a good Greek scholar yet a sort of Evan Roberts, rarely entering the pulpit without strong conflict of soul, yet moving large audiences to an extraordinary degree. In 1818, after staying with his friend Sigston of Leeds, he started out early one morning for Manchester, and a few minutes later he died in Albion Street. "William Dawson preached the funeral sermon to about ten thousand persons, in the open air, near the spot where the veteran fell." Sigston, who was afterwards well-known as a Methodist reformer, wrote Bramwell's biography.

It is not possible for me to enlarge further. William Dawson, the farmer of Berwick, in Yorkshire, one of the most dramatic preachers ever heard in Methodism or out of it, and as

good as he was gifted; Samuel Hick, another Yorkshire local preacher, mighty in prayer and inimitable in humour; Samuel Drew, shoemaker, metaphysician, editor, who refused a professorship in the London University; and William Carvosso, the leader of the revival of 1814 in Cornwall—these were perhaps the most notable, but at the same time quite representative, of the laymen to whom Methodism owed so much. As Abel Stevens says: "The local preachers supplied the pulpits in the absence of the itinerants; the class-leaders supplied an effective pastoral supervision; the prayer-leaders kept the villages, the towns, the counties, alive with social devotions; and thousands, tens of thousands of laymen were effective home missionaries, preaching Christ with colloquial simplicity, but with Divine power, from house to house."

X

THE GATHERING OF THE STORM

THE foregoing account of the spiritual side of Methodism was necessarily condensed and brief—far too brief to do justice to the subject; but it was necessary in any study of Methodism as a development. It was just this spiritual enthusiasm which gave to Methodism its indestructible vitality, and without which it would have been effectually destroyed by the storm which was already gathering. But, seeing the high interests at stake, what a tragedy that storm was! What an inexpressible pity that it was not averted!

How then did it come about? The one cause of it undoubtedly was pastoral supremacy—pastoral supremacy in the Conference and in the circuit, pastoral supremacy which was asserted more and more em-

phatically as years went on. The occasion of the storm might be some irrelevant incident—an organ, a college, or a pamphlet; the real cause was pastoral supremacy. It was this which, in one form, had driven out Alexander Kilham and, in another form, had driven out Bourne, Clowes, and O'Bryan; but now, during the next quarter of the century, from 1827 to 1852, it was to drive out tens of thousands.

That laymen were already taking a somewhat prominent place in Wesleyan affairs must be admitted. In 1801, immediately after the secession of the Methodist New Connexion, the Wesleyan Conference agreed that the circuit stewards should have power to attend the District Meetings and advise respecting financial settlements. By a curious inadvertence this resolution was not printed in the Minutes, and had to be inserted in the magazine. The policy of consulting with the laity was gradually extended to the committees. In 1803 the Committee of Privileges was first appointed, consisting of two preachers, six laymen, and a general solicitor. In due course, and mainly through the action of Bunting, the Missionary Committee was made to consist equally of ministers and laymen. One by one the

Chapel Committees, the Contingent Fund Committee, the Schools Committees, and others, were formed on the same basis. In 1833 there were one hundred and seven laymen on these mixed committees. With respect to this important fact Dr. Gregory says: "At first the mixed committee was a strong sea-wall against popular encroachment on pastoral prerogative. . . . But the representative principle was by Dr. Bunting most resolutely resisted. He contended strongly that all lay admission, even into the financial management of Connexional funds, must be by selection on the part of the ministers, not by election on the part of the people. So in these committees laymen were not likely to be chosen who would probably oppose the course which their selectors were most solicitous to carry.[1]" With all their large semblance of power these laymen enjoyed very little real power. They must know their place, must not trench on any forbidden ground, must not question a decree of Conference, and must not agitate for any reform. Besides, they were not elected by the people. "Lay delegation," said Bunting in 1835, "is dead and buried."[2]

During all this time the power of the

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 497. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 209.

Conference was being more and more firmly established. The hardening tendency was indeed inevitable. By the Plan of Pacification it was decided that the Conference was to remain exclusively ministerial, and to this dominant fact everything must be subordinate. If the preacher was supreme in the Conference he was supreme also between the Conferences. The clear-minded Kilham saw this distinctly when the Plan of Pacification was agreed upon: "Though there is an *appearance* of giving up much, yet is anything given up in reality? The superintendent claims the right of nomination; and, therefore, though the Leaders' Meeting may reject several, yet they must submit to have such as he pleases, while the nomination rests solely with him. Pray, where is the sacrifice of power in this rule? Is it not more in words than in reality?" Kilham did not go far enough. The preacher had the right of nomination, he had also the power of expulsion; and he had the power of dismissing a meeting as he thought fit. It was preachers armed with these extraordinary powers who constituted the Conference. This Conference held practically the whole of the property. It had the power of appointment to all the

pulpits. It sat with closed doors. It was not amenable in any way to the Churches. It could punish any agitator. It could refuse any memorial. There was no court of appeal. Let the people keep their place. Let no preacher of liberal views presume. Dr. Gregory relates that on one occasion he was in a minority of five in favour of a motion. The President rose up and said "Will the brethren who have voted for this stand up that *we may see who they are?*"[1] Somebody afterwards said to Gregory that there were two hundred in the Conference who thought as he did, but *they dared not vote.* So the tendency steadily hardened. A study of the evolution of Wesleyan law from 1797 to 1849 would probably show that in almost every detail it meant the growth of the power of this ministerial irresponsible Conference.

By far the ablest champion of pastoral supremacy was Dr. Jabez Bunting, the strongest man in Methodist history. Born in 1779 and dying in 1856, he lived to the age of seventy-seven, and for fifty-seven years was in the Wesleyan ministry. He was the first Assistant Secretary to the Conference in 1806. He was the first man to be

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 493.

elected, not by seniority but by nomination, to the Legal Hundred, and that when he was only thirty-five years of age. He was Secretary of the Conference ten times and President four times, his first presidency being in 1820, when he was but forty-one years old. He was both Connexional Editor and Book Steward; was Senior Missionary Secretary for more than twenty years, and the President of the Theological Institution from its commencement until his death. Another office which this pluralist held, and which gave him immense power, was that of the Convener of the Stationing Committee. Also, he was the "official adviser" to the President of the Conference year by year—an office which began and ended with himself. For fifty-four years he was a member of every Conference, except that of 1830.

What can be said of this remarkable man? Fortunately for us, in the *Sidelights*, written by the late Dr. Gregory, who was ex-President and for some years Editor, Bunting's portrait has been drawn at full length. This is all the more valuable because it contains the journals of the Rev. Joseph Fowler, father of the Right Hon. Sir Henry Fowler, which were jotted down at Conferences during a period of forty years.

It was of Joseph Fowler that Bunting said in 1849, "I have great confidence in one individual who has been accustomed to take from year to year reports of the proceedings of Conference." Those reports are before us in the *Sidelights*. With perfect courtesy, and sometimes with marked affection and veneration, Dr. Gregory in this book does ample justice to the intellectual abilities of Bunting, his love for Methodism, his high and honourable motives, and his personal character; but while doing that, he also furnishes an absolutely trustworthy and unanswerable indictment of Bunting's policy and conduct in the Wesleyan Conference. No man can claim to understand Bunting who has not carefully studied the *Sidelights*. It will be seen, I think, that never in the history of Methodism has there been a man in whom high moral worth and the cruel despotic temper have been so strangely blended.

The key to his policy was the supreme authority of the pastorate.[1] To this everything must give way—settlements, regulations, enactments, or Plans of Pacification. He eschewed anything like a digest or codification of law because the supremacy

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 499, 500.

of the pastorate must never be endangered. Whatever else had to go the rightful authority of the pastorate must be secured.[1] This was the principle which for fifty years he was working into Wesleyan law. From the first he was impatient of opposition. His method in committee was simplicity itself. The first duty of members of committees was to repose confidence in the officials; the officials must know better than anybody else what was wisest to be done; and he was the leading official. In the Conference his powerful personality carried everything before it. He was the permanent official. As the Convener of the Stationing Committee, he held the key to the circuits. It was wise for the preachers to stand well with him. Anything like an objection to his proposals was construed into want of confidence. "Hitherto I have met with the approval of my brethren; if they do not approve of this particular action I will retire from all my offices."[2] He was notoriously impatient of criticism. In 1834 he cried out, "If I am to be the butt out of doors I do not wish to be the butt of this Conference. I wish I had a cottage in the wilderness."[3]

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 82. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 504.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

And, like all thin-skinned men, he was, when occasion served, overbearing. There were few leading independent men in the Conference whom he did not insult. He accused Dr. Adam Clarke, of all men, of selling his influence.[1] He declared that Dr. Beaumont for defending Adam Clarke had something wrong with his head and his heart. He insisted that Beaumont was not fit for the Legal Hundred because he refused to sign the Declaration of 1835.[2] He objected to the memoir of the lamented John Bakewell Moulton because he had not been "Methodistically loyal"—that is, he had not agreed with Bunting on "the laying-on of hands."[3] He publicly told Thomas Galland that he owed to him his continuance in the body. Towards Joseph Fowler he was habitually rude. It did not occur to Bunting that in moral refinement these men were his superiors. He himself must be exempt from criticism. Nor must any committee that he had to do with be criticised in Conference, not even by a minority of its own members. The officials must not be "badgered"[4]—such was his phrase. His colleagues on the platform must be as

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 104.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 263.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 243.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 285.

exempt from criticism as himself. The Conference tamely submitted, for who would dare to measure swords with this giant? Whole reports were adopted without a word.[1] The appointment of Thomas Jackson, Bunting's nominee, to the Theological Tutorship was carried without even a vote.[2] Discussion was stifled. The preachers were afraid to speak. In the Conference of 1844 only twenty-seven preachers took part in the debates at all.[3] In 1837 the Conference had actually to be adjourned because Bunting was away for a single session. "At last the President proposed the adjournment of the Conference, a very proper suggestion, as in Dr. Bunting's absence it appeared *nothing could be done.* On the reassembling of the Conference, Dr. Bunting having returned, business was resumed." At a Bristol Conference he refused to serve on the Stationing Committee because some of his arrangements the year before had been overruled. In consequence of his absence the members had to take a half-holiday on Clifton Downs, being unable to proceed with further business.[4] These facts are almost incredible, and would not be stated except on the authority of

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 286.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 316.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 379.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

Fowler, and because they throw light on Bunting's character. Amazing as they are, however, they are outdone by what took place in the Conference of 1844 when Bunting was in the chair for the last time. Certain resolutions having been carried against his judgment, and another motion having been submitted, "he abruptly left the chair, and declared he would sign the journal, thus dissolving the Conference before the stations were confirmed, and much of the most important business yet unfinished."[1] At length the determined man was mollified, but the motion was never carried.

Such was the man who governed and moulded Wesleyanism for half a century, and was mainly responsible for its appalling disruptions. His apologists claim that he vindicated the sovereignty of the Conference. What he was concerned about was the sovereignty of the preachers both in the Conference and in the circuits. His control of Wesleyan affairs closed in 1848 when his strength began to fail. All he could do during the remaining eight years of his life was to look upon the ruin he had caused.

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 375.

XI

THE PROTESTANT METHODISTS

NOT long after the Brunswick Chapel in Leeds was opened, in September, 1825, a desire was expressed by several trustees to furnish it with an organ. In the early part of 1827 the question was submitted to the Leaders' Meeting, and the superintendent, Thomas Stanley, stated that the Conference would not listen to any application for permission to build an organ unless the leaders' concurrence could be obtained. At a subsequent meeting a resolution against the proposal was carried by sixty leaders out of sixty-two present. The regulation of the Conference, passed in 1820, was as follows: "In some of the larger chapels, where instrumental music may be deemed expedient, in order to guide the congregational singing, organs may be allowed by the special consent

of the Conference; but every application for such consent shall first be made to the District Meeting; and, if it obtain their sanction, shall then be referred to a committee at the Conference, who shall report their opinion as to the propriety of acceding to the request, and also as to the restrictions with which the permission to erect the organ ought, in that particular place, to be accompanied." Under the circumstances the District Meeting of May, 1827, decided that "it was *not* desirable to grant the required permission to place an organ in Brunswick Chapel." Undeterred by the action of the District Meeting, and without the knowledge or consent of the Church, the trustees made direct application to the Conference; and the Conference, in violation of its own law, granted permission. An organ was therefore erected in Brunswick Chapel, costing, as some one said, "a thousand pounds and a thousand members."

The application of the trustees to the Conference came to the ears of the local preachers and leaders by sheer accident. George Marsden, who had travelled in the Leeds Circuit three years before, met a Leeds local preacher in the Conference town, and told him what had taken place. He sug-

gested that the leaders and local preachers should hold a meeting and send a deputation to the Conference. This was accordingly done. At this Conference Edmund Grindrod was appointed to succeed Thomas Stanley as the superintendent of the circuit. Almost the first action of Grindrod was to suspend for three months the secretary, Matthew Johnson, one of the most highly esteemed Methodists in Leeds, for having summoned the meeting held during the sittings of Conference. Sixty other leaders and preachers, unable to separate themselves from their secretary, then withdrew for the same period. A special District Meeting was convened in the early part of December. It was at this meeting that Jabez Bunting, who had no right whatever to be present, but who dominated the whole proceedings, said that "Methodism knows nothing whatever of democracy; it is as much opposed to democracy as it is to sin." Matthew Johnson and the Society steward were then found guilty of having summoned a meeting illegally and were expelled from the Society.

Three weeks later, on Christmas Day, 1827, the first public service of the seceders was held, and, as a delightful yet unconscious augury of future union, it was held in the first

Methodist New Connexion Chapel, Ebenezer, where, in 1797, the first New Connexion Conference had assembled. The secession was serious. "In addition to the thousand members who disowned all connection with the Conference Society, there would probably be about two thousand hearers and nearly as many Sunday scholars." The agitation spread to Yeadon, Barnsley, Halifax, Preston, York, Sheffield, London, and other places. The Conference of 1828, by a considerable majority, sanctioned the special District Meeting and confirmed its action.

The story cannot be told without awakening the suspicion that something lay behind it. Why did the people dislike the introduction of an organ? Why did the Conference deliberately break its own laws? Why was the special District Meeting, constitutional or not, so ready to sanction the expulsions? Why should this painful incident be the starting-point of a disastrous agitation?

In answering these questions let us not deride immoderately the prejudice against organs, nor say, as Dr. Rigg says,[1] that "the organ meant a solemn, perhaps a stately public service, conducted by an educated order of ministers." It meant much more

[1] *Life of Jabez Bunting*, p. 106.

than that. What these Leeds Methodists held was that the organ was intended to be the precursor of the Church of England service. "This feeling," says Dr. Gregory, "was far from extinct seventy years ago in Nonconformist circles. Hence until the present generation there was no organ in the two great London chapels, City Road and Queen Street." The prejudice, if so it may be called, was by no means confined to Yorkshire. On February 5, 1828, Dr. Adam Clarke wrote to Daniel Isaac: "You and I had the honour of being numbered with the seventy-five preachers who wrote and signed our protest against the first organ which the eloquence of Mr. Bunting got set up in Brunswick Chapel, Liverpool, and which to my own knowledge has been an unmixed curse to that chapel, and, I doubt, to the Society in general."

Further, it is easy to see that the anger of the seceders must have been roused by the expulsion of Matthew Johnson. Mr. Johnson was a gentleman, a Christian, a class-leader, a preacher, devoted to his Church, and honoured by all who knew him. That he was technically wrong, as secretary, in summoning the meeting, and that he used unguarded language, may, or may not, be

conceded, but surely his expulsion was an act of madness.

The same may be said about the expulsion of his colleagues, as, for example, James Sigston and John Yewdall. The former was the intimate friend and biographer of William Bramwell. He was a schoolmaster of considerable reputation in his day, and the author of several educational works. He was a man of high culture and saintly character. The latter was a business man, fervent in spirit and gentle in demeanour. Next to William Dawson he was probably the best known local preacher in the neighbourhood of Leeds. Who can wonder that the people were incensed by the expulsion of such men?

Still further, the case was rendered more difficult by the conduct of Mr. Bunting. While Bunting was editor "he had frequently recommended that the Liturgy of the Church of England should be used in the Connexion as part of the regular morning service." It was proposed in 1824, in the Quarterly Meeting, to invite him to the Leeds Circuit, but on account of his leanings towards the Church of England service the proposal was carried only by a small majority. He refused the invitation, and at the Conference declared

"that the time had not yet arrived when it was necessary for him to go begging for a circuit." In the Conference of 1827 he championed the cause of the trustees. Grindrod was his nominee, and, as Gregory says, was under Bunting's inflexible will. It was Bunting who suggested the special District Meeting and who controlled it, although, as I have said, he had no right whatever to be present. At the next Conference he defended it in a speech two hours long, and argued that it was "*constitutional in the extraordinary circumstances*." This conduct could admit only of one interpretation to the Leeds Methodists. Certainly it helped to kindle a fire which soon became a conflagration.

Bunting said in the Conference: "These Yorkshire Methodists with all their excellences, need teaching a lesson." They learned a lesson which Bunting did not mean to teach. Rightly or wrongly, they avowed that the Conference was an organised clerical tyranny. What right, they asked, had the Conference to break its own laws? What right had it to force an organ upon an unwilling people? What right had it to sanction an unconstitutional special District Meeting? What redress could the circuit obtain for

unjust expulsion? It did not take long for these questions to lead up to the supreme and crucial question. What right had the Conference to exist at all as a conclave of preachers, exercising authority over the people, instead of deriving its authority from the people? Dr. Smith says: "It became quite clear that the organ question was little more than a pretext for the violent and revolutionary language and conduct of the dissentients, which evidently resulted from a settled antagonism to those views of the scriptural character of the pastoral office on which the whole economy of Methodism is founded." Such a statement is hardly worthy of an historian; but it will serve to show distinctly enough, though in a rather distorted way, that the issue raised in this dispute was not the detail of an organ, but the constitution of the Conference, or, in other words, the doctrine of pastoral supremacy.

Dr. Gregory points out that the terrible experience killed preacher after preacher.[1] Daniel Isaac, before his three years' term was over, became paralysed. Edmund Grindrod, though he left after one years' service, "never recovered from the shock to his health." The third preacher, Close, died five years later of

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 96.

a "fatal malady traced to these disturbances." Thomas Galland, a noble-hearted man, broke down in the midst of years, "his health seriously affected by these conflicts," and Thomas Bridgman died in 1832. But what about the expelled? Over their sufferings let us lower the veil.

XII

THE WESLEYAN METHODIST ASSOCIATION

DR. RIGG, in his *Jabez Bunting*, speaks of the Protestant Methodist secession as "soon extinguished." It was never extinguished at all. It was the beginning of the '49 disaster. It awakened the conscience of the Methodist people as nothing had done before, and it started questions not easily settled. It impelled the London South Circuit to send a memorial to the Conference, which Richard Watson replied to in his *Affectionate Address*. An ominous uneasiness was felt in many other circuits. The thoughts of preachers and people alike were turned more and more to Bunting—the masterful, dangerous man at the head of the Connexion; and it was feared by many that he had too much power.

The agitation was strengthened by the political temper of the time. The Reform

Bill was passing through Parliament, and England was entering upon a new era of political progress. Trouble soon arose. *The Christian Advocate*, which was the first, and then the only, Methodist newspaper, began to show Liberal proclivities, and its editor, John Stephens, ventured to criticise Bunting for having voted at Liverpool in favour of Lord Sandon, who was a Tory, a slave-owner, and a stout advocate of the Slavery laws. In Bunting's defence it was urged that Lord Sandon was in favour of all improvements in the condition of the slaves, and also of supplying them with religious instruction. The Conference censured Stephens, and Bunting professed himself "deeply and eternally obliged." In 1833 the editor's brother, J. Rayner Stephens, was censured by the Conference and compelled to resign for having spoken publicly in favour of Disestablishment. In course of the debate Bunting said: "If I went from the Methodists I would go to Church rather than to Dissent. I would not go to fierce formal Dissent. We cannot be friendly to Dissent. One of its first principles is: Every man shall choose its own minister. Can you be friendly to that?"[1] Toryism is always professedly free

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 162.

from partisanship, and so the Conference insisted on abstention from all politics. But at the very time that the two brothers Stephens were driven out, Thomas Jackson, Connexional editor, was writing articles against Dissent, and on the cover of the magazine was advertised an Address exhorting the electors to pledge their candidates to the support of the present connection between Church and State. These things made an unfavourable impression on the people.

At the Conference of 1833 a committee was appointed to "arrange a plan" for the education of candidates for the ministry. It met on October 23rd, and not only proceeded to arrange a plan but also nominated Bunting, notwithstanding that he was the Missionary Secretary, to hold the office also of President of the Theological Institution. In the Committee Dr. Warren was apparently in favour of the Institution, but at the following Conference he admitted, after some pressure, that he had changed his mind on the whole subject, his objections being mainly that (1) the Committee had gone beyond its instructions, (2) that the question of the Theological Institution had not, as was required by the Plan of Pacification, been submitted to the circuits, and (3) that

"he saw in the scheme an attempt to invest Dr. Bunting and his friends with power dangerous to the liberties of the preachers and the people." Soon after the Conference he issued a pamphlet embodying these views. He was then suspended by a special District Meeting. It was openly declared, of course, that he was acting from disappointed ambition. His reply was: "Not until it was proposed to surrender almost the whole power over the Institution into the hands of one individual, that is to say, almost the sole dictatorship both of the Home and Foreign Departments—not until this posture of affairs was too obvious to be misinterpreted, did I express any opposition." Then, with an extraordinary want of judgment, he made an application before the Court of Chancery for the Oldham Street pulpit to be restored to him. Lord Lyndhurst refused the application, thereby declaring the Deed Poll as having established legal validity. This was on March 18, 1835.

There can be no doubt that by a large section of the Methodist people as well as many of the preachers, partly from fears which happily have not been justified and partly from a mistaken desire to preserve old Methodist usage, the idea of a ministerial

training was regarded with disfavour; but as was afterwards proved, the proposal to start a Theological Institution was not the most powerful factor in the agitation. An Address was issued from Rochdale, signed by James Hoyle, chairman, and seventy-eight of his brethren who were stewards, trustees, leaders, and local preachers, which probably expresses the general feeling. After enumerating the causes of discontent, such as the expulsions, the vetoing of discussion in the Quarterly Meetings, the omission of the Plan of Pacification from the Conference journals, the suspension of Warren, the exclusive management of the funds by the preachers, &c., the Address proceeds thus: "Therefore, the great, the sole remedy for these evils is the immediate *admission of the people* to a share of power in the government of the Church." Around that one vital question, and not the establishing of a Theological Institution, the agitation gathered.

On April 25, 1835, immediately after the lawsuit, a meeting was held in Manchester attended by delegates from all parts of the kingdom. Much had been going on already in the circuits. David Rowland and R. D. Farrar, two of the worthiest of men, had been expelled in Liverpool for having

attended what were called illegal meetings. Similar expulsions had taken place in Manchester, Hull, Rochdale, Sunderland, Whitehaven, Birmingham, London, and other circuits. A meeting, consisting of officials from Manchester and Liverpool, had been held in November, 1834, at which it was decided to form the Grand Central Association. The Rochdale Address was issued three months later. All this was preliminary to the historic meeting in April, attended by more than a hundred delegates. It was now evident what was in the minds of these men. Their demand, formulated in nine definite proposals, was, *first*, self-government in the circuit, and, secondly, representation in the Conference. The people, as the Rochdale Address put it, must have a share in the government.

On July 30th, concurrently with the sittings of the Conference in Sheffield, the delegates met a second time. At this Conference Warren, Robert Emmett (a supernumerary), and John Averell (of Camelford) were expelled. The day before the opening a meeting of Wesleyan laymen was convened by the President for the purpose of discussing the Association movement. Bunting told them that although lay representation could

not be conceded, and the power of the preacher could not be impaired, "still, he thought that guards should be introduced to prevent a preacher from abusing his power; and that, in other respects, the rules might be modified, especially as to the mode of memorialising the Conference." This speech was the germ of the resolution of 1835, from which I have already quoted.[1] Under the guise of conceding the rights of the people, and guarding them against unfair expulsion, it asserted, with the greatest strength, the right of expulsion, and armed the preacher with absolutely despotic power. This resolution legalised, to some degree, the wicked expulsions which had already taken place, and it did probably more than anything else in bringing about the appalling disruption of 1849. The Wesleyan laymen, as we may call them by way of distinction, professed themselves satisfied by Bunting's deliverance. The Association delegates remained in session seven or eight days. Their Address to the Conference was answered with cold contempt. They then issued their final appeal to the people. During the year they were joined by the Protestant Methodists.

On August 3, 1836, the first Annual

[1] See p. 10.

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OF THEOLOGY LIBRARY

Assembly of the Wesleyan Association was held in Manchester, attended by eighty-nine representatives, with Dr. Warren as president, and Mr. Matthew Johnson as secretary. At the following Assembly, which met in Liverpool, it was decided that the preachers should not ex-officio be members of the Assembly. Warren withdrew three months afterwards. He was not an Alexander Kilham. He never honestly believed in freedom as far as he understood it. He was, in his way, an honest, able man; much maligned, deficient in tact, devoid of true leadership, and even when he denounced evils in the Conference, was quite unable to see clearly the principles underlying them. He reappeared as a clergyman of the Church of England. His son was a barrister and a novelist, the author of *Ten Thousand a Year*.

When the numerical returns were reported in 1839 it was found that there were about twenty-eight thousand members in the new body, including members on trial. If we assume, as probably we may, that the same number of adherents and also Sunday scholars withdrew, then the total loss to the Wesleyan body was about eighty thousand. This was unspeakably grievous, both to the mother-Church so deeply

wounded and to her children so cruelly driven out. The tragedy is that they never would have been driven out but for a Conference constituted exclusively of preachers. The homeless wanderers went out like Abraham, "by faith, not knowing whither they went." They had no ministry and hardly a single chapel. But they had laymen who for courage, generosity, piety, wisdom, and nobility of character were not surpassed by any laymen in the whole history of Methodism. John Petrie, who practically was the first treasurer of the Association, was pre-eminent for his child-like transparency and his unbounded liberality. Matthew Johnson, the secretary, was calm, dispassionate, and tactful, a loveable man as well as an able administrator. They had worthy comrades in all the circuits—men of culture and substance, better still, of high Christian character and steadfast purpose.

The great statesman of the body was Robert Eckett, a London layman who was expelled in 1835, and afterwards entered the Association ministry. He was without his equal as a debater in the Assembly, and exercised a commanding influence in the framing of the rules of government. He

died suddenly at Clevedon, on July 28, 1862, in the sixty-fifth year of his age.

Under the watchful care of such men the young denomination grew. In two or three years it had come into possession of six hundred chapels and preaching rooms, established a Book-room, issued a magazine, compiled a new hymn-book, and, what was still more significant, had undertaken missions in Hamburg, the West Indies, West Africa, and Australia. It called out a ministry of one hundred faithful men, all of whom laboured indefatigably for the building up of the cause. Some of them are still remembered as great preachers, and several, as, for instance, Thos. Townend, J. H. Roebuck, John Guttridge, and Marmaduke Miller, won considerable distinction outside.

One fact must be mentioned, because of its bearing on what followed. A declaration was prepared in 1834 by the London preachers, at the instigation of Dr. Bunting, and sent out for signature to all the preachers, declaring their confidence in the Connexion, their conviction of the purity of its government, and the integrity of its character. The first number of the *Watchman* newspaper, published in January, 1835, contained this declaration with 832 signatures.

Others were added afterwards. Woe to the men who refused to sign! Jacob Stanley was that year second on the list for the presidency—fourteen votes lower than the first—but because of his refusal to sign he had to wait ten years; and probably would not have been then elected but for the reaction which had set in against Bunting after his fourth presidency. In the Centenary year, 1838, Bunting objected to the nomination of J. Cushworth for the Legal Hundred, on the ground that he had not signed this 1834 Declaration. Bunting added: "I maintain that no one who did not sign the Declaration should be elected to the Legal Conference. I think that Dr. Beaumont should give us a reason why he did not sign it."[1] Beaumont complained: "I have been held up as unworthy of admission into the fellowship of the Legal Hundred for no other reason than that I did not see it best to put my name to a document sent out by brethren who had no more right to send it out than I had not to sign it." This was signature under penalty with a vengeance! It was made to do duty once more in 1849, as we shall see.

NOTE.—Only a few sentences can be given

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 262.

to the Arminian Methodists who joined the union in 1837. They were expelled from Wesleyan Methodism in 1832, and then numbered about 550 members (the majority of whom resided in Derby) with thirteen local preachers. They were accused of teaching that faith was human, not that they ignored the need of Divine help, but rather that they held that, the help having been given, the seeking soul ought at once to believe. Holding that the doctrine of faith which they opposed was tainted with Calvinism, they styled themselves Arminian Methodists. They also encouraged female preaching, which probably was the real cause of offence. One of their preachers was Elizabeth Evans, now immortalised as Dinah Morris in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*.[1] Their first minister was Henry Breeden, originally a schoolmaster at Redditch. In 1837 Henry Breeden, John Wright, and James Slack were received as Arminian Methodist preachers, along with two probationers, Samuel Sellars and Thomas Poynton, into the Wesleyan Association ministry.

[1] A tablet to her memory is placed in the Wirksworth Methodist Free Church, where she used to worship.

XIII

THE REFORM AGITATION

THE *Fly Sheets*, which, as is well known, led to the expulsions in 1849, and the disruption which ensued, were issued in four numbers, the first two appearing in 1846, and the last in 1848. They were, and, as a matter of fact, still are, anonymous, professing to emanate from a committee; and, for the purpose of secrecy, they were addressed from different towns. In the first instance they were not sold but were sent by post to the preachers only. Possibly they would have been consigned to oblivion or kept only as literary curiosities, but for one circumstance. On the 1st of January, 1849, appeared the first numbers of *The Papers on Wesleyan Matters*, intended as a counterblast to the *Fly Sheets*. Some reply to these *Papers* was necessary, and the authors of the

Fly Sheets replied by publishing the four numbers in a bound volume with the publisher's name on the title-page. Now they became known to the people, and by the almost incredible folly of the Conference they were made the occasion of the most terrible disruption in Methodist history.

The first number dealt with "Location, Centralisation, and Secularisation." The officials, it was contended, were retained too long in office and were suspected of cliquism, of secret intrigues and selfish schemes. They were all, or nearly all, located in London. There ought to be a constant change in the Connexional Committees. The second number dealt with "The Presidential Chair, The Platform, and The Connexional Committee." The mode of nominating and electing the latter should be changed. The ballot especially was recommended. In the third number the questions of "Reclaimed Ground, The Legal Hundred, The Core and Cure of Misrule, Floating Opinions, and other Miscellaneous Matters," were discussed. The fourth number referred to "The Stationing Committee," which it stigmatised as "the slaughter-house of ministerial character." It will be at once seen that these subjects, taken by themselves, were quite legitimate for

public discussion. They were of ephemeral character, and at this time of day they are somewhat uninteresting to an ordinary reader.

A good deal has been said about the tone and literary merits of the *Fly Sheets*. In all fairness no critic ought to give any dogmatic pronouncement on these points unless he has gone through the publications which were issued by the Wesleyan Book-room, especially the anonymous articles in the *Watchman*. Dr. Gregory, speaking of one of the latter, says that its language "far exceeded in coarseness anything which had discoloured the *Fly Sheets*, and certainly deserved the epithets applied to the *Fly Sheets*—slimy and disreputable." Let it, however, be admitted at once that the *Fly Sheets* are now rarely read except with feelings of regret. They are extravagant, highly-coloured, and sarcastic in their style, and are too often occupied with trivial and irrelevant details. It is easy to see how much more effective they would have been had they been written in a spirit of perfect self-restraint and intellectual detachment. But the men who wrote them belonged to a fierce time and had been stabbed by the Conference sword.

Impartial people, however, after making

due allowance for the exaggerations and other defects of the *Fly Sheets*, will go on to ask the one really vital question: Were the statements in the *Fly Sheets* as to matters of fact substantially true? The reply can be given only in the affirmative. Substantially, though perhaps not in every particular, the statements were true. Can anybody imagine that if they had been entirely false such men as Beaumont, Fowler, and Walton, not to speak of James Everett, would have been suspected of writing them? They, at any rate, were men of unsullied honour and large information. Indeed, Joseph Fowler deliberately avowed —"I am asked to declare that the *Fly Sheets* are wicked lies. I cannot, for it is well known that many of the sentiments therein expressed have been mine for years." If the *Fly Sheets* had been "wicked lies," whether uttered clandestinely or not, would not the Conference have exposed them? Instead of doing that, it pursued another course.

As to the ethics of anonymous writing, the reader may be referred to Chew's *Life of James Everett* (pp. 373–379), in which the whole subject is treated with singular ability, judicial impartiality, and unanswerable logic. The writers of the *Fly Sheets* pleaded in

their defence: "There is wisdom in working under cover, when it is certain you would not be listened to openly. Under cover we can go unmolested, till the whole tale is told—till the whole case is opened; otherwise, an endeavour would be made to stop us at the outset." Undoubtedly that was true. The Conference simply revelled in the exercise of its despotic power. It deposed one man for "maladministration which had caused disturbance." It charged another with "having spoken against certain members and acts of the Conference."[1] His justification, given innocently enough, was: "I thought I had a right to take which side I pleased." Another man was censured for having allowed his beard to grow. He was told either to shave or to resign. Another was charged with "having drawn the editor into an unseemly newspaper contest for having given a faithful review of one of his publications." He was required to acknowledge he had done wrong, "and Dr. Bunting was satisfied." What would have happened if the writers of the *Fly Sheets* had divulged their names? They would have been connexionally exterminated, and with very scant delay.

The anonymous *Fly Sheets* came before

[1] *Sidelights*, pp. 424, 515.

the Conference of 1847, and at the instigation of Dr. George Osborn, a "Test" was "permitted" to be applied. This was a Declaration to be signed by the preachers, declaring that they had no connection with the *Fly Sheets*. Osborn said, "We issued a test in 1797 and again in 1835. Why not do so in 1847? If men refuse to sign, we shall know how to deal with them; we shall know whom to trust. If we will not be partakers of other men's sins we must purge ourselves."[1] Samuel Dunn asked, "Is the alternative of signing resignation or expulsion?" To this no answer was given. At the close of the Conference the "Test" had been signed by six hundred and fifty. Copies of the "Test" were then sent to other preachers. Some signed, others held back. Three months later (October 22, 1847) another communication was sent to those whose signatures were missing, and again on October 31, 1848, a third communication. At the Conference of 1849 matters were coming to a head. Osborn said that the question for them was "how to cast out the scorner." He would hunt out those who still refused to sign. His first victim was a paralysed old preacher named Fielden. The old man, lifting up his right hand,

[1] *Sidelights*, p. 409.

trembling with emotion and paralysis, said, "This hand for years has not been able to write." Osborn then let him go. He then accused Dr. Beaumont, without any definite result, although it was understood that he disavowed any connection with the *Fly Sheets*. Everett was summoned from York. It was explained to him that there was no charge but only a "friendly inquiry." The friendly inquiry, of course, was: "Are you the author of the *Fly Sheets?*" He answered, "Prefer your charge in writing. I will not be the man, even at the risk of expulsion from the body, to convert the Methodist Conference into a Romish inquisition." His expulsion was carried with but two dissentients. Bromley, who declared he had no answer to give to the "friendly inquiry," was then censured by the Chair, only to be expelled, however, the following Conference. Samuel Dunn and William Griffith, who also refused to answer, were expelled for their communications to the *Wesleyan Times*, a weekly paper of liberal ideas, and the *Wesley Banner*, a magazine of which Samuel Dunn was the editor. Daniel Walton, one of the most honourable men in the body, was "severely admonished."

Gregory records that on the next day, when

these proceedings became known outside, "all faces gathered blackness." The newspapers spoke in one voice of condemnation. The *Times* said: "Talk of the Star Chamber! A man might hold his tongue in that court, take his trial, and escape if the evidence did not support the charge." The *Nonconformist* styled the Conference as "perhaps the most execrable form of priestly intolerance and exclusiveness to be found within these realms." A fortnight after the expulsion an enormous meeting was held in Exeter Hall, which was the first of crowded public meetings held in all parts of the country. During that year Everett, Dunn, and Griffith addressed 139 public meetings, which were attended, it was computed, by 170,000 persons. On the 11th of March an aggregate meeting of delegates was held in London, and five months later a second meeting. The agitation, unmistakably spontaneous at the outset, was now being rapidly organised. When the Wesleyan Conference met in 1850 it had to report a loss of more than 57,000 members.

The expulsions had commenced in real earnest. Armed by the resolution of 1835 the preachers hoped to quench the fire they had ignited. All, of course, were not alike.

Some, chiefly among the older preachers, showed wisdom ; and, in fact, Beaumont was formally censured by the Conference of 1850 for his "mild administration of London VI." Alas! this wisdom was not shown by all. "Some circuits," says Gregory, "bore Methodistically the aspect of a country under martial law. Judgment was given by youngsters against veteran Class Leaders who had been in the service twice as long as their condemnators had been in the world." In some cases whole societies were summarily expelled. A member had only to speak a word of sympathy with the Reform movement, and no matter how aged, how useful, how worthy, or how influential he was, his name was struck off the class book. The facts simply beggar description. Let me give three or four out of thousands. G. W. Harrison, the first Mayor of Wakefield, was expelled for having lessened his subscription to the West Parade Chapel. Joseph Massingham, of Norwich, father of the well-known journalist, was expelled for having attended Reform meetings. His society classes comprised 150 members. They followed him loyally. Mrs. Whitehead, of Rawtenstall, leader of five classes, and certainly one of the most highly honoured ladies in Rossendale, was expelled

for having started a class which the superintendent, John Hornby, did not approve. Joseph Chipchase, one of the ablest preachers in London, was not tried at all, but was informed by letter that he had forfeited the right of membership. W. H. Cozens-Hardy, a lawyer and county magistrate of Holt, in Norfolk, and father of the eminent Lord Justice Cozens-Hardy, ventured to reply to some statements which had been made by the superintendent about the Reform movement, and was therefore summoned to a Circuit Meeting to answer a charge. He was unanimously acquitted by the seventeen officials and leaders who were present. He was then summoned before a Minor District Meeting. He attended under protest, and having protested he withdrew. All the preachers present voted for his expulsion except Thomas Rowland (brother of David Rowland already referred to), who said, "If the design of our proceedings as a Minor District Meeting be to lead to the expulsion of Mr. Cozens-Hardy, then I cannot be a consenting party to that design." For this action Rowland was made a supernumerary, and at the next Conference compelled to leave the county. The Sharmans of Sheffield, the Cuthbertsons of London, the Sharpleys

of Lincolnshire, John Benson of Newcastle, Joseph Green of Shields, and many others come to mind; but why recite their experiences? Unhappily or happily, they were samples of thousands of God-fearing Methodists, rich and poor, in town and village societies, who, for their love of freedom, were expelled.

One thinks of the struggle with unutterable pain. There were good men on both sides. Among the preachers there were those who, while grievously mistaken as to their ideals, their policy, and their methods, honestly thought they were guarding the best interests of Methodism, and among the expelled there were those who, to use the language of Benjamin Gregory, "were at heart most loving and devoted Methodists, my zealous fellow-labourers in the work of the Lord." Let us forget the hot, lurid passions of that terrible trial. One looks back on it all, I say, with pain. It was a tragedy, for with proper judgment it might have been so easily avoided. During those five years the Wesleyans lost more than 100,000 members. The fruitful garden of Methodism was despoiled. A great and noble Church was reduced, for a time, almost to ruin.

Everett, Dunn, and Griffith were widely

different from one another. Everett was the most distinguished biographer that Methodism has yet produced. His *Village Blacksmith*, *Adam Clarke Pourtrayed*, *Polemic Divine*, and *Life of Wm. Dawson* will always be essential to the student of Methodism. They are admirable pieces of word-painting. It was well said of him on the marble tablet erected to his memory that he was "a wise counsellor, a faithful friend, a generous man, and an able and successful preacher." His critics say of him that he sometimes dipped his pen in vinegar. They should remember that he was the bosom friend of Dr. Adam Clarke, and could never forget the harsh and ungenerous treatment dealt out to that great man by Bunting's party in the Conference. He was the intimate friend also of Daniel Isaac, who for publishing his liberal views in his *Ecclesiastical Claims* was solemnly censured by the Conference of 1816 and repudiated by the Book Room. Everett knew that Isaac was never quite the same man afterwards. Dunn was a refined, stately, dignified sort of man. He soon fell out of the ranks. He lived a blameless life, and died full of honour. William Griffith was an indescribable man —strong as a giant, physically and mentally,

yet tender as any woman; a lion-hearted warrior for the truth, yet the most delightful and gracious of friends; erratic, impulsive, and at times even boisterous, and yet, taken altogether, the very soul of good sense and sound judgment. He was superintendent of the Ripley Circuit when he was expelled. He spent the remainder of his days in Derby, honoured by the whole community.

The two lessons of the agitation were incontrovertible. These three good and noble men would not, and could not, have been expelled if the Conference had been representative, instead of being a secret exclusive conclave of preachers possessing almost absolute power; and, secondly, the expulsion of thousands of members could not have taken place if the circuits had had self-government. These two principles—the Conference deriving its authority from the people, and the circuit governed by the circuit—had been fought for by Kilham in 1797, and insisted upon by Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, by William O'Bryan and James Thorne; but now, in 1849, they were asserted with an emphasis never to be forgotten.

Besides the 100,000 members who were lost to the Wesleyan body, there were probably as many adherents lost also. In-

cluding these and the Sunday scholars, it is safe to say, if this calculation be correct, that the expulsions and withdrawals would be not much less than two hundred thousand. Of this vast number many thousands strayed hopelessly into the world, and many thousands joined other Churches where they could enjoy liberty. As for the rest they held together for a while as federated societies, vainly hoping that the doors of the old home which, though it had treated them so inhospitably, was still their old home, would be at least in some degree thrown open to them. Eventually, in 1857, the majority of them became amalgamated with the Wesleyan Association, to be known as the United Methodist Free Churches. The remainder became organised as Wesleyan Reformers. Although comparatively few they are vigorous and enterprising. The Connexional bond is not strong. Their Conference, or Aggregate Meeting, as it is called, meets year by year. Their membership, including members on trial, is now over 9,000.

The United Methodist Free Churches have steadily gained in strength. Owing to the circumstances of its birth, this denomination had at the outset to encounter prejudices both against the ministry and against Con-

nexionalism, and it had also to encounter grave disabilities in the lack of funds, chapels, and Connexional property generally. The prejudices and the disabilities have now alike disappeared. Free Methodism has now its 1,600 chapels and preaching-rooms, its colleges, its mission fields, its departmental funds, and a ministry of considerable power and culture. Consolidation and evangelism have gone hand in hand. Connexional loyalty has grown steadily, and the sovereignty of the Assembly is now an established fact. During the last half-century there have been eight years of numerical decrease, amounting in all to 2,632, but during that same period there have been forty-two years of numerical increase, amounting in all to more than 50,000. At the last Annual Assembly it reported 90,642 members (an increase during the year of 2,419), and 12,277 members on trial, besides 4,505 who are reckoned as Junior Church members, being under sixteen years of age, making a total of 107,424. The Theological College in Manchester is endowed to the extent of £20,000, chiefly through the energy of Mr. James Duckworth, M.P. The Ashville College, Harrogate, is a valuable property covering about thirty acres.

XIV

METHODISM AS IT IS

IN tracing the modern developments of Methodism we have had to deal with the divisions of former days ; to explain why the Methodist branches exist at all, why they are different from one another, and why they have so much in common. We have striven to be perfectly straight and fair, but all the way through we have done our somewhat uncongenial work with extreme reluctance, and have felt that, to some whom we deeply love, the narrative would give pain. On the other hand, we have felt that something was due to the pioneers of Methodist freedom who unfortunately have been so often misunderstood.

But now, for awhile, let us escape from the din and clang of controversy. Let us dwell on the peace and prosperity which God has

graciously given to the Methodism of to-day. There was a time when the mention of "Methodism as it is" roused men's anger; but in our time it fills all hearts with thankfulness and praise. For Methodism is now an unbroken fellowship. Its leading men, to whatever denomination they may belong, esteem and trust one another. Year by year every Conference sends deputations to all the other Conferences. There is an all-pervading spirit of mutual confidence, mutual consultation, and co-operation. The Methodist people are one in heart. To appropriate the lines of Milton:

> "No war or battle's sound,
> Is heard the world around;
> The idle spear and shield are high up hung."

It would be a delightful occupation to describe the progress of the spiritual movements of Methodism during the last half-century. Methodism, blessed be God, has not been wholly absorbed in controversy. Tens of thousands of Methodist preachers, class-leaders, Sunday-school teachers, visitors of the sick, organisers of Church work, and others, have been quietly toiling, generously giving, and earnestly praying for the extension and consolidation of the Churches. Nor must

we forget the influence of the godly Methodist home, to be found, happily, in almost every village. It is to these spiritual unseen forces that Methodism owes its present position. But in this brief account they can only be suggested. The reader must be left to linger over the picture with a sympathetic imagination.

The general statistics of all Methodism are now published annually in the "Minutes" of the Conference. They are worthy of careful study, as indicating the immense strength and resources, and also the indestructible family spirit of Methodism throughout the world. In the following table of figures the reference is to Great Britain alone. In the seven Methodist Churches of England there are—

Ministers	4,354
Local preachers	41,942
Church members	921,270
Sunday Schools	14,355
Teachers and officers	184,630
Scholars	1,871,682
Churches	16,178

One fact deducible from these figures is that three out of every four—possibly four out of five—Methodist services are conducted by laymen. In the churches of all Methodism in England and Scotland no fewer than 25,000

sermons are preached every Sunday by local preachers; or, in other words, more than a million a year. It is well known that very many of these services are in village chapels; and, with this in our minds, we are able to realise what an unspeakable blessing to the villages Methodism, and particularly the Methodist local preacher, have been and still continue to be.

There is no reference in these figures to foreign missions. We have, therefore, to add that these foreign stations, not including Ireland, France, and South Africa, report a membership of 157,134. To the honour of Wesleyan Methodism it must be said that, while that great mother-church has 58 per cent. of the membership at home, it has actually 92 per cent. of the membership abroad. If the South African Church be included, the percentage is still higher. The smaller Methodist bodies, all combined, are able to report not more than 27,832 members on the foreign mission field; but let it not be forgotten that they were born late, and have had to build their denominational superstructures from the very foundations.

With regard to the increasing value of Methodist property in this country, there is some difficulty in forming an accurate

estimate. At the Ecumenical Conference of 1901, in a paper carefully prepared by the Rev. E. Boaden, it was estimated that since 1855 the Wesleyan Methodist Church had expended £10,000,000. "The expenditure sanctioned by the Chapel Committee during the five years (1896–1900 inclusive) was £1,560,975, or £312,195 per year. £879,560 is the estimated cost of premises belonging to the Methodist New Connexion. The Primitive Methodists have laid out on their property some £4,000,000, the United Methodist Free Churches about £2,248,416, the Bible Christians £523,220, and the Wesleyan Reform Union about £129,000." Owing to the impetus supplied by the Twentieth Century Funds, the work of extension is being carried on with quite unprecedented energy. Last year alone the Wesleyan Methodists erected 133 new chapels, providing 20,553 sittings. They are able to report 5,685 Trusts as free from debt. In the other denominations the debts are larger, though they are being rapidly reduced.

No account of Methodism can be satisfactory which leaves out some mention, however brief and cursory, of the great Central Missions of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. In London, Manchester, Salford,

Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Bolton, Sheffield, Nottingham, and other towns, these Missions are being conducted with extraordinary success. Large sums of money are being expended, and immense congregations are being gathered to hear the Word. The other Methodist Churches are moving in the same direction, though at some distance behind. The special Missions at Lady Lane, Leeds, at Bermondsey and King's Cross in the Metropolis, worked by the United Methodist Free Churches, have been singularly successful, and may be noted as cases in point. One feature of them all is their splendid social work—the reclamation of drunkards, the provision of Preventive and Rescue Homes for Girls, the opening of Tramps' Wards, &c. Here we may refer to the Children's Homes and Orphanages—a philanthropic work with which the name of Dr. Stephenson will always be associated. In this connection, too, may be mentioned the Sisterhoods of Methodism, all created within the last twenty years. The Wesley Deaconess Institute now includes 133 Sisters, who are engaged, not only in the Central Missions, but also in the Churches and on the foreign missionary field. The Bowron House Sisterhood, supported by the United Methodist Free Churches,

includes upwards of 30 Sisters who work in similar ways. They have been instrumental in many thousands of conversions.

We have stated that in English Methodism there are 4,354 ministers. We may boldly point to this immense band of preachers, to their purity of life, their loyalty to duty, their love of the people, their spirit of consecration to Christ, their faith in the doctrines they preach, and their zeal for the conversion of souls ; and then we may venture to ask whether in the whole range of English life there can be found any other band of men who, in these high moral and spiritual qualities, can be pronounced superior to them ? The intellectual culture of the Methodist ministry is also considerable. Methodism has always had its scholars and writers, but they were never more distinguished and numerous than now. Its colleges —Richmond (Surrey), Didsbury (Manchester), Headingley (Leeds), Handsworth (Birmingham), Alexandra Park (Manchester), Victoria Park (Manchester), Ranmoor (Sheffield), and Shebbear, in Devonshire, are all doing good work. Most of them are well endowed and admirably equipped. The Methodist ministry, if it cannot claim to be in the first rank with regard to scholarship,

certainly excels in preaching power. Its system of itinerancy, perhaps, militates against its influence outside, but notwithstanding, it can boast of many of its preachers who have the ear of the entire nation. The Revs. H. Price Hughes, Charles Kelly, J. Scott Lidgett, J. Travis, and Dr. Townsend, have been elected to the chair of the National Free Church Federation. What probably is more to the point is that the preaching in the 16,000 Methodist pulpits of this land, which is in every way admirable, is constantly growing in culture and intelligence.

On the subject of present-day Methodism we have now said enough for our purpose. It will serve to indicate the abounding vitality of the Methodist people. For the liberal bodies of Methodism we have nothing but admiration. When we think of their difficulties and disabilities, when we remember that they began late, were few in number of membership, and had to build every chapel, school, and manse, to call out their ministry and to organise all their activities, we look upon the result as being indeed a great achievement. For Wesleyan Methodism, too, as an organised evangelism, we have nothing but admiration. Goethe said that "noble examples made difficult enterprises

easy." The words are certainly true of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Its bold programme, its immense resources, its generosity, and its power of marshalling all its forces towards one definite end, give to it a very important place in national life. Best of all, while it is practical in its methods and broad in its human sympathies, it still places the emphasis on depth of spiritual experience.

XV

THE DECLINE OF THE CLERICAL IDEAL

THROUGHOUT the course of this narrative we have had to witness the conflict of two ideals. On the one side there was the clerical ideal, which insisted on the supremacy of the pastoral office, which was rooted in the High Churchmanship of Wesley, and which had been strengthened by Methodist traditions and institutions. Opposed to it there was what, for want of a better word, may be called the Scriptural ideal, which insisted on the brotherhood of the Church, was rooted in spiritual experience, and was strengthened by all the liberal and progressive tendencies of the nineteenth century. Up to '49 the former had apparently triumphed. It had cast out of Wesleyan Methodism one reformer after

another—"the so-called cranks and firebrands," as they are described in the *Life of Hugh Price Hughes*—and now it seemed to have asserted undisputed dominance. But had it really triumphed? We have now to show that, so far from having triumphed, it had, on reaching the height of its power, precisely then started on its inevitable decline.

The symptoms of decline first appeared in the very midst of the Reform disruption. We have already adverted to the fact that for half a century the laymen had been admitted into all the important committees and the District Meetings. This policy, if not initiated by Dr. Bunting, was certainly favoured by him. He was always rather proud of the fact. In 1876 the saintly William Arthur, speaking on the admission of laymen into the Conference, quoted some remarkable words uttered by Bunting when dying, which till then had never been mentioned to living man: "My policy has been misunderstood. My real policy was to secure the just rights of the people, or the proper representation of the people" (Mr. Arthur did not remember which phrase), "and many of the old preachers thought I went too far." Probably the stern old

warrior had in mind the policy of admitting laymen into the committees.

But what took place after the Reform agitation? The Conference of 1851 appointed a committee to discuss the various subjects of Connexional law and discipline, with a view to *further* concessions to the laity. A report was afterwards presented and regulations were adopted, which Dr. Rigg describes as follows: "The convulsions of 1849–52 taught the Connexion, and in particular the Conference, lessons of the highest importance. In 1852 the Quarterly Meeting was so defined as to make it the *great representative meeting* of the circuit, including stewards, leaders, local preachers, and trustees. The *right of memorial to the Conference* was given to it in the widest and freest sense. These powerful bodies invite ministers to the circuits or decline to do so, determine and pay their 'allowances,' as salaries to ministers are still called in the Connexion, and review all the interests of the circuits, spiritual and financial. They had also conferred upon them in 1852 the right to appoint a *circuit jury of appeal* from the verdict and findings of a Leaders' Meeting in cases of discipline."[1] All this, it is quite true, did not amount to much in itself,

[1] *Encyc. Brit.*

but it indicated the beginning of the decline of the clerical ideal.

It was twenty years from this date before any steps were taken towards the admission of laymen into the Conference itself; but opinion was silently gaining ground. The preliminary stages need not now be particularised. In June, 1876, a special committee of thirty-four ministers and thirty-four laymen, appointed partly by the Conference and partly by the District Meetings, was convened in London for the purpose of preparing a scheme. It is impossible to read the proceedings of that Committee without being struck with the change which had come over Wesleyan Methodism. A reader of Methodist history feels as if he had stepped into a new world. The admission of laymen into the Conference was no longer regarded as unscriptural and unconstitutional, but was recognised as absolutely necessary.

Dr. George Osborn, the incarnation of pastoral supremacy, was still irreconcilable. He said, "I hold myself pledged to the men who admitted me into the Methodist ministry not to vote for the resolution now before us. I take exception day and night to the conduct of men who say that, though they have

signed the Thirty-nine Articles, they are free to hold and teach Romish doctrine. I take a parallel exception to the conduct of men who have received the 'Large Minutes,' and the signatures that they have received them with, and then hold themselves free to make such changes in the constitution of Methodism as this resolution involves. I have no more to say." He was supported by only one or two of his brethren. Connexional thought was far in advance of him, venerated as he was for his long service.

The references made in this special committee by many speakers to the agitation of '49, were strikingly significant. They occur frequently, and are always in the same strain. The lesson of that struggle had begun to work its way into the Wesleyan mind. Let me quote several of these references: "Discussion I have never feared; but ever since 1849 my deep dread—my soul's horror—has been agitation, and that alienation of large portions of our people from the Conference, and the preachers which first gave the agitation its foothold, and then its deadly power."[1] "I know what was the case which was really brought before the Conference in the last agitation, and my

[1] William Arthur.

opinion is that all this agitation turned on this one question."[1] "I am old enough to remember two of those Methodist agitations to which reference has been made, and I never wish to see another. Some of my family connections were separated from Methodism in 1835, and were lost to the Society in consequence of it."[2] "I have been long enough a Methodist to have lived through 1849, and consequently to have learned that the very worst thing that could come to the Methodist Society is agitation from any point of view."[3] "I was ordained in 1849. I sat in the gallery with Dr. Punshon, and witnessed the expulsion of Everett. The great question was the exercise of discipline by ministers upon ministers."[4] "In 1849, I escaped the immediate danger of the tempest which you passed through in England, as I was in France at that time. But my sympathies were with those who asked that the laity should join the work of the Conference."[5] To these testimonies I will add one more, though it does not refer to the Reform agitation: "Lay representation is a point on which we in Scotland feel some-

[1] John Farrar. [2] J. Barlow, of Bolton.
[3] H. J. Atkinson, D.L. [4] Thomas M'Cullagh.
[5] Sir Isaac Holden.

what deeply. We live in the midst of Presbyterians who are strong in their attachment to their own system, and who tell us not unfrequently of our subordinate position."[1] These remarkable words were spoken mostly by laymen—laymen who were not only influential, but who represented the District Meetings and, indeed, a large proportion of the laity of the denomination. A change had unmistakably come over Wesleyan Methodism.

Lay representation was finally agreed upon by the Conference of 1878. That year must always stand out as a landmark in Methodist history. It was then decided that the Conference should be composed of 240 ministers and 240 laymen. The majority of the laymen were to be elected by the District Meetings, the numbers varying according to the circumstances of the districts. The ministers were to meet first in order to elect the president, to fill up vacancies in the Legal Hundred, and discharge the properly pastoral functions of the Conference. The mixed Conference was to meet afterwards, to discuss and settle the business of all the funds and the general administrative departments of the

[1] C. B. Davidson, of Aberdeen.

body. This arrangement continued until 1900, when it was resolved that the Representative Mixed Conference should henceforth meet before the Pastoral Conference, and also that it should be enlarged to 300 ministers and 300 laymen. Several other changes have since been effected in the Wesleyan economy, not the least being the recent proposal to create the Church Meeting. A Committee to give effect to the proposal was appointed at the last Conference.

As regards the growth and prosperity of the liberal Methodist bodies, it is not necessary to supplement what has been mentioned in previous pages. But something should be said about their efforts, to come together in organic union. So far back as 1836 there were negotiations for union, and again in 1855. These, unfortunately, were abortive. Memories were then too vivid. It may be said that from the first, to their great honour, the leaders of the Methodist New Connexion were among the pioneers in this movement. They did not always proceed wisely, but their faces were always turned in the right direction. In 1867 they appealed to all the Methodist bodies, their appeal, however, ending in a vague proposal for some sort of federal co-operation; in 1869

they approached the Bible Christians, and in 1888 they conferred with the leaders of the United Methodist Free Churches, and a provisional scheme was agreed upon in committee. All these attempts to effect union were futile. In 1895 the Primitive Methodist Conference passed a resolution in favour of union with the Bible Christians, but two years later the negotiations were terminated by an unfavourable vote of the Primitive Methodist Quarterly Meetings. In spite of these frequent failures, the desire for Methodist union was irrepressible and unquenchable. In the end it was found that the failures had taught lessons of the highest value, and were themselves the prelude to success.

The only success so far had been the amalgamation of the Wesleyan Association and the Reformers in 1857, when they became known as the United Methodist Free Churches. This was an instructive object-lesson. For the amalgamation had been perfect, the circuits being of one heart and soul and creating a connexional life which, in its warmth and richness, far surpassed the expectations of early days. But a larger union is now actually within sight. In the month of December, 1902, a large committee, some-

what informal, but extremely important, comprising representatives of the United Methodist Free Churches, Methodist New Connexion, and Bible Christians, met for the purpose of discussing organic union. At this and one or two subsequent meetings a tentative scheme was prepared and recommended to the Conferences for adoption. The Conferences were practically unanimous in their approval, and a still larger committee was officially appointed. When, in 1903, the tentative scheme was submitted to the circuits the members declared themselves to be also practically unanimous, for 95 per cent. of those present at the Quarterly Meetings voted in favour of the union. An elaborate report, framed with great care and ability by the Union Committee, was submitted to the Conferences of 1905, and received their unanimous sanction. It has since been emphatically approved by the Circuit Quarterly Meetings. To the unspeakable joy of all true Methodists, the Conferences of 1906 have now taken what is practically the final step. Organic union may now be regarded as certain. The first Conference of the new body, to be known as the "United Methodist Church" will be convened in 1907. Its polity will be the out-

come of a century of experience, and will embody all the best in the three separate bodies. The negotiations have been conducted with the most perfect harmony and enthusiasm, yea, with an unanimity almost unprecedented. The result will be a liberal Methodist Church of over 190,000 members and probationers, and spread like a network over the entire area of the country.

The polity of the United Methodist Church may be summarised in a few sentences. The Church Meeting is to consist of all persons who are fully accredited members, and it shall transact business connected with the Church. The Leaders' Meeting will be composed of certain officers and representatives appointed by the Church, and its functions shall be as generally existing now in the three separate Churches. The superintendent minister will be ex-officio chairman of business meetings; and in circuits worked sectionally, his colleague. The Conference will be the Sovereign Power. It will be elected by the District Meetings, and will have a certain number of Guardian Representatives. The District Meeting will exercise very considerable power, being, in fact, a sort of local Conference. It will consist of ministers, circuit stewards, and members of Connexional

Committees. Representatives equal in number to ex-officio members will be chosen by the Circuit Quarterly Meetings. The present doctrinal standards of Methodism are, of course, to be maintained. The constitution has been formed in some degree with an eye to a larger Methodist Union in days to come.

Will the larger Methodist Union ever be attained? By many of the best and wisest men on both sides it is earnestly desired, and this desire is one of the forces which will ultimately bring it about. But wise men recognise facts, and try to interpret facts in the light of history. What are the facts of the Wesleyan polity? The crucial questions to be considered are such as these: Are the laymen in the Wesleyan Conference elected in any true sense by the people? Have the functions of the Pastoral Conference been surrendered? Has the right of pastoral nomination and, with it, of pastoral control, in relation to membership, leadership, trusteeship, the circuit plan and circuit offices, been surrendered? Has either the Church Meeting or the Leaders' Meeting, in a case of discipline, any power to enforce its judgment? Has the superintendent ceased to be superior to, and independent of, the Church? Is it the

fact that neither in the Conference nor in the circuit has the layman an equal right with the minister in matters of spiritual administration? To all these questions the answer is disappointing. Dr. Rigg, who is always straightforward and well informed, has declared that, notwithstanding the changes that have taken place in the Wesleyan polity, the power of the pastorate remains intact and inviolate. To use his own precise language in the Methodist Union Committee, "it has not been changed one iota." On this point, at all events, Dr. Rigg is an authority. The power of the pastorate remains; and in the interests of Methodist Union we ought to recognise this crucial fact quite frankly. That this ministerial power is rarely put into force in any objectionable manner, that it is often neutralised by the unofficial influence of the laity, and that the argument for it is now frequently shifted, even by Wesleyan ministers, from the ground of Scripture to that of practical expedience and convenience, are considerations quite beside the mark. Pastoral supremacy is an insurmountable barrier to union. Liberal Methodism will never go back on its own history.

This doctrine of pastoral supremacy has

little to be said for it, but if it had to be destroyed by argument alone we might well despair of union. Fortunately, dissolvent forces, mightier far than mere argument, are already at work. There comes a period in the history of every error when it is discovered to have been silently undermined and loosened, and then it is publicly disowned. Sometimes the repudiation is as unexpected as the fall of an avalanche. So possibly will it be with this doctrine of the pastorate. All the teachings of Scripture are against it. The spirit of the age is against it. The sufferings of the expelled are a condemnation of it. The finest instincts of the Church are repelled by it. Some day it will be disowned; and then there will be Methodist reunion. When that glorious goal is attained we shall all marvel why a result so reasonable, so natural, so statesmanlike, so politic, so Scriptural, and, above all, so true to the heart of our Saviour, was not reached earlier. In the meanwhile, let all liberal Methodists come together, confident that by their own organic union they are making the larger reunion of Methodism to be, sooner or later, inevitable.

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